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1 — EPA: 'Data gaps' block verdict on fracking, drinking water, WHIO, 12/13/2016

<http://www.whio.com/news/national-govt--politics/epa-data-gaps-block-verdict-fracking-drinking-water/ePlpv7ktVKKQW9ox0qEdcJ/>

Hydraulic fracturing to drill for oil and natural gas poses a risk to drinking water in some circumstances, but a lack of information precludes a definitive statement on how severe the risk is, the Environmental Protection Agency says in a new report that raises more questions than answers. The report removes a finding from a draft issued last year indicating that fracking has not caused "widespread, systemic" harm to drinking water in the United States.

2 — 4 million Americans could be drinking toxic water and would never know, USA Today, 12/13/2016

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/12/13/broken-system-means-millions-of-rural-americans-exposed-to-poisoned-or-untested-water/94071732/>

The leaders of this former oil boomtown never gave 2-year-old Adam Walton a chance to avoid the poison. It came in city water, delivered to his family's tap through pipes nearly a century old. For almost a year, the little boy bathed in lead-tainted water and ate food cooked in it. As he grew into a toddler — when he should have been learning to talk — he drank tap water containing a toxin known to ravage a child's developing brain.

3 — EPA weighs in on Dripping Springs wastewater permit, KVUE, 12/12/2016

<http://www.kvue.com/news/investigations/defenders/epa-weighs-in-on-dripping-springs-wastewater-permit/368892386>

The EPA told the state of Texas they are concerned with how the state would allow dripping springs to discharge its wastewater. They stated issues in a letter to TCEQ and asked for more information.

4 — Amendment speeds up reimbursements for mine spill, Daily Times, 12/12/2016

<http://www.daily-times.com/story/news/local/new-mexico/2016/12/12/amendment-speeds-up-reimbursements-mine-spill/95348144/>

Federal lawmakers representing New Mexico say the approval of an amendment to expedite reimbursements for expenses incurred during the Gold King Mine spill is a victory for local governments and residents.

5 — Oklahoma Lawmakers Consider Selling Power Plants To Fill Budget Hole, NPR, 12/12/2016

<https://stateimpact.npr.org/oklahoma/2016/12/12/oklahoma-lawmakers-consider-selling-power-plants-to-fill-budget-hole/>

Oil prices are on the rebound, which should eventually generate revenue and help Oklahoma's state budget situation. Still, another budget hole — that could be as large as \$600 million — will likely have to be filled during the 2017 legislative session. One emerging idea that could put an extra billion dollars in state coffers: Selling the Grand River Dam Authority.

6 — 50-foot dredging depth proposed for parts of lower Mississippi River, Times Picayune, 12/12/2016

http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2016/12/corps_backs_50-foot_depth_for.html

Portions of the Mississippi River's main ship navigation channel, including stretches between Southwest Pass and the river's mouth and between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, would be deepened to 50 feet under a plan and environmental assessment recently released by the Army Corps of Engineers. That's three to five feet deeper than present.

7 — EPA turns down \$20.4M in Gold King disaster requests, Greenwire, 12/12/2016

<http://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2016/12/12/stories/1060047049>

U.S. EPA said Friday it will pay \$4.5 million to state, local and tribal governments in relation to the 2015 Gold King mine disaster, but rejected \$20.4 million in other requests related to the spill. An EPA-led crew triggered the 3-million-gallon spill from the inactive mine in Colorado while doing cleanup work. The toxic wastewater traveled into rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.

8 — FORT STOCKTON HAS A SURPLUS OF AQUIFER WATER AND THE CITY WANTS TO SELL IT, Texas Standard, 12/9/2016

<http://www.texasstandard.org/stories/categories/energy-environment/>

Fort Stockton is partnering with local water system builders to quench the collective thirst of communities and cities across west Texas and as far as Austin. The project would tap aquifers underneath the city to sell to places that need long-term solutions to Texas' water problem. The city is partnering with veteran water businessman Alan Murphy to bring the plan to fruition.

9 — Watershed meetings underway, Ark. Democrat Gazette, 12/12/2016

<http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2016/dec/12/watershed-meetings-underway-20161212/>

About 100 people attended the first public meeting of an 18-month process to create a watershed management plan for the Buffalo River last week. Many of them — farmers, neighbors and outsiders who love the Buffalo — agreed on some of the same concerns for the river: too much gravel in the river, failing septic tanks, erosion.

10 — After years of drama, farmers score a big win in California water battle, McClathyDC, 12/10/16

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/congress/article120131428.html#storylink=cpy> ,

The California water bill now ready for the president's signature dramatically shifts 25 years of federal policy and culminates a long and fractious campaign born in the drought-stricken San Joaquin Valley.

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EPA: 'Data gaps' block verdict on fracking, drinking water

Updated: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 10:26 AM

Published: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 10:01 AM

By: Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hydraulic fracturing to drill for oil and natural gas poses a risk to drinking water in some circumstances, but a lack of information precludes a definitive statement on how severe the risk is, the Environmental Protection Agency says in a new report that raises more questions than answers.

The report removes a finding from a draft issued last year indicating that fracking has not caused "widespread, systemic" harm to drinking water in the United States. Industry groups hailed the draft EPA study as proof that fracking is safe, while environmentalists seized on the report's identification of cases where fracking-related activities polluted drinking water.

The final report takes pains to avoid drawing any conclusions.

"The report provides valuable information about potential vulnerabilities to drinking water resources, but was not designed to be a list of documented impacts," the EPA said in a statement provided to The Associated Press ahead of the report's release on Tuesday.

Fracking involves pumping huge volumes of water, sand and chemicals underground to split open rock formations so oil and gas will flow. The practice has spurred an ongoing energy boom but has raised widespread concerns that it might lead to groundwater contamination, increased air pollution and even earthquakes.

Tom Burke, EPA's science adviser and a deputy assistant administrator, said in an interview that the removal of the phrase about "widespread, systemic" impacts came at

CLOSINGS AND DELAYS: TOTT BURKE, EPA's science adviser and a deputy assistant administrator, said in an interview that the removal of the phrase about "widespread, systemic" impacts came at the urging of the EPA's Science Advisory Board.

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"Data gaps did not allow us to quantify how widespread the impacts are," Burke said.

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In light of comments by the science adviser and factors, top EPA officials "concluded that sentence (about widespread impacts) could not be supported," Burke said.

Environmental groups have claimed that the finding of no widespread harm was inserted into the draft report at the insistence of the White House. President Barack Obama generally supports fracking as part of a wide-ranging energy strategy.

A spokeswoman denied that the White House applied political pressure regarding the report's language.

Like the draft study, the final report found specific instances where poorly constructed drilling wells or improper wastewater management affected drinking water. Impacts generally occurred near drilling sites "and ranged in severity, from temporary changes in water quality to contamination that made private drinking wells unusable," the EPA statement said.

In a draft report issued in June 2015, the EPA said that the number of contamination cases was small compared to the large number of wells that are fracked nationwide.

The EPA assessment tracked water used throughout the fracking process, from acquiring the water to mixing chemicals at the well site and injecting so-called "fracking fluids" into wells, to collection of wastewater, wastewater treatment and disposal.

The report identified several vulnerabilities to drinking water resources, including fracking's effect on drought-stricken areas; inadequately cased or cemented wells resulting in below-ground migration of gases and liquids; inadequately treated wastewater discharged into drinking water resources; and spills of hydraulic fluids and wastewater.

Congress ordered the long-awaited report in 2010, as a surge in fracking fueled a nationwide boom in production of oil and natural gas. Fracking rigs have sprouted up in recent years in states from California to Pennsylvania, as energy companies take advantage of improved technology to gain access to vast stores of oil and natural gas underneath much of the continental U.S.

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Report: President-elect Trump picks Rick Perry as his energy secretary

Updated: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 10:03 AM

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Published: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 9:56 AM

By: Jonathan Tilove - Austin American-Statesman

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NEW YORK, NY - NOVEMBER 21: Former Texas Governor Rick Perry leaves Trump Tower on November 21, 2016 in New York City. President-elect Donald Trump and his transition team are in the process of filling cabinet and other high level positions for the new administration. (Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images) (Spencer Platt)

Former Texas Gov. Rick Perry is President-elect Donald Trump's choice for secretary of energy, CBS and MSNBC reported Monday night.

The apparent choice followed Perry's meeting with the president elect in New York Monday, his second post-election meeting with Trump at Trump Tower.

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The choice of Perry for a place in the Trump Cabinet is remarkable from every vantage point.

Perry, in his second presidential campaign, was among Trump's most vociferous critics, describing Trump in July 2015 as a "cancer on conservatism" and a "barking carnival act" who was "appealing to the worst instincts in the human condition."

And it was Perry, in his first presidential campaign, who at a Republican presidential debate in November 2011, declared, "It's three agencies of government when I get

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there that are gone: commerce, education, and the un ... what's the third one, there? Let's see. The third one. I can't ... Oops."

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>> **Related: Donald Trump's transition:** The latest news (/news/news/national/donald-trumps-transition-latest-news/ntCB6/)

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It was an indelibly embarrassing moment that served as a death knell for his once-promising presidential campaign, and, it turned out that the third agency he wanted to eliminate but whose name eluded him was the very department that the man who he had warned would lead the GOP the way of the Whig Party has now asked him to

lead.

Perry was the first man out of the crowded Republican field last year, and he subsequently endorsed Texas Sen. Ted Cruz for president. But, when Cruz bowed out of the race after Trump beat him in the Indiana primary in May, Perry threw himself behind Trump's candidacy with his trademark enthusiasm and made it clear he would be delighted to serve in the New Yorker's administration in whatever capacity Trump, who had suggested during the campaign that Perry should have to take an IQ test to qualify for the debates, would find useful.

Perry campaigned for Trump and, in a page from the Trump reality television playbook, he also did a brief stint on Dancing with the Stars, in which his sheer ebullience compensated for his lack of experience or skills as a dancer, making a winning impression before his early exit from the show.

Perry had also been talked about as a potential secretary of defense, of agriculture and of veterans affairs.

"Rick Perry's Texas led the nation in job creation, wind energy, natural gas and oil production and electric generation," Ray Sullivan, a former chief of staff to Perry as governor and spokesman for his first presidential campaign, said Monday night.

"Perry's balanced regulatory policies reduced toxic air pollutants in Texas, while encouraging job creation," Sullivan said.

"Overall, Rick Perry's experience reforming big government agencies, encouraging job creation, championing a diverse and reliable energy portfolio, and serving as an officer in the U.S. military are all stellar qualifications for a U.S. energy secretary."

Perry also serves on the board of Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners, a pipeline company headed by Kelcy Warren, the finance chairman of his second presidential campaign. As CEO and chairman of Energy Transfer Partners, Warren has faced criticism over the company's Dakota Access pipeline project, which has drawn opposition from environmentalists and the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in North Dakota.

The current secretary of energy is Ernest Moniz, a nuclear physicist.

Trump says he will leave his businesses Jan. 20 to focus on presidency; official announcement postponed

Updated: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 8:59 AM

CLOSINGS AND DELAYS:

Published: Monday, December 12, 2016 @ 10:11 PM

By: Kelcie Willis - Cox Media Group National Content Desk
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A Look at Donald Trumps Most Prominent Businesses

President-elect Donald Trump is leaving his businesses in January.

Trump **tweeted Monday night** (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/808528428123254785>) that, although he is "not mandated by law to do so," he is leaving his businesses before Jan. 20 to "focus full time" on his presidency.

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"Two of my children, Don and Eric, plus executives, will manage them," Trump said (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/808529888630239232>), referring to Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump. "No new deals will be done during my term(s) in office."

(<http://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/808528428123254785>)

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Donald J. Trump

@realDonaldTrump

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Even though I am not mandated by law to do so, I will be leaving my businesses before January 20th so that I can focus full time on the.....

10:26 PM - 12 Dec 2016

8,992 36,349

(<http://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/80852988630239232>)



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

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Presidency. Two of my children, Don and Eric, plus executives, will manage them. No new deals will be done during my term(s) in office.

10:32 PM - 12 Dec 2016

7,301 29,328

Trump previously tweeted that he would hold a news conference (<http://www.ajc.com/news/national/trump-tweets-that-leaving-business-focus-presidency/zPnCTvQxJdSDiKcHXyAkoK/>) Thursday to discuss that he is leaving his businesses completely.

Related: Trump tweets that he's leaving business to focus on presidency(<http://www.ajc.com/news/national/trump-tweets-that-leaving-business-focus-presidency/zPnCTvQxJdSDiKcHXyAkoK/>)

"I will be holding a major news conference in New York City with my children on December 15 to discuss the fact that I will be leaving my great business in total in order to fully focus on running the country in order to MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN! While I am not mandated to do this under the law, I feel it is visually important, as President, to in no way have a conflict of interest with my various businesses. Hence, legal documents are being crafted which take me completely out of business operations. The Presidency is a far more important task!"

The transition team backpedaled on the date Monday, saying that the press conference would be rescheduled for January.

(<https://twitter.com/brianstelter/status/808452385207185408>)

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Trump press secretary Hope Hicks: "The announcement has been rescheduled for next month." via @DylanByers

5:24 PM - 12 Dec 2016

24 44

Trump repeated some of that information Monday night (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/808532286664822784>), but did not mention a specific date.

"I will hold a press conference in the near future to discuss the business, Cabinet picks and all other topics of interest. Busy times!"

(<http://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/808532286664822784>)



Donald J. Trump

@realDonaldTrump

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I will hold a press conference in the near future to discuss the business, Cabinet picks and all other topics of interest. Busy times!

10:41 PM - 12 Dec 2016

8,055 32,619

Neither Trump, or his surrogates, have given any specific details on how his sons Donald Jr. and Eric will operate without the president-elect at the helm, **The Washington Post** reported (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/12/12/trump-postpones-announcement-on-how-he-will-avoid-conflicts-of-interests/?utm_term=.0aa6b1eb9602).

The paper reported that the senior Trump is required to release his personal financial information in May 2018.

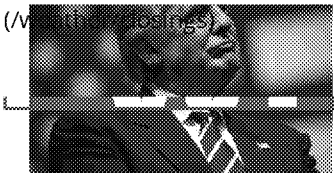
Trump's daughter, and advisor, Ivanka is expected to also step away from the business side of the family. She and her husband **were recently seen looking at homes** (<http://www.wokv.com/news/news/national/ivanka-trump-jared-kushner-planning-move-washingto/ntKBP/>) in the DC area.

Sunday, Trump had said he was going to give day-to-day control of his business empire to his three oldest children, **but The Post reported** (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/12/12/trump-postpones-announcement-on-how-he-will-avoid-conflicts-of-interests/?utm_term=.0aa6b1eb9602) that he may not fully separate himself from the company that bears his name.


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(http://www.whio.com/news/national-govt--politics/president-elect-donald-trump/qoRrN1LZESS9H5wJHME2FO/)

 President-elect Donald Trump

(http://www.whio.com/news/national-govt--politics/president-elect-donald-trump/qoRrN1LZESS9H5wJHME2FO/) 3 hours ago

5 things to know about Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson

Updated: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 6:43 AM

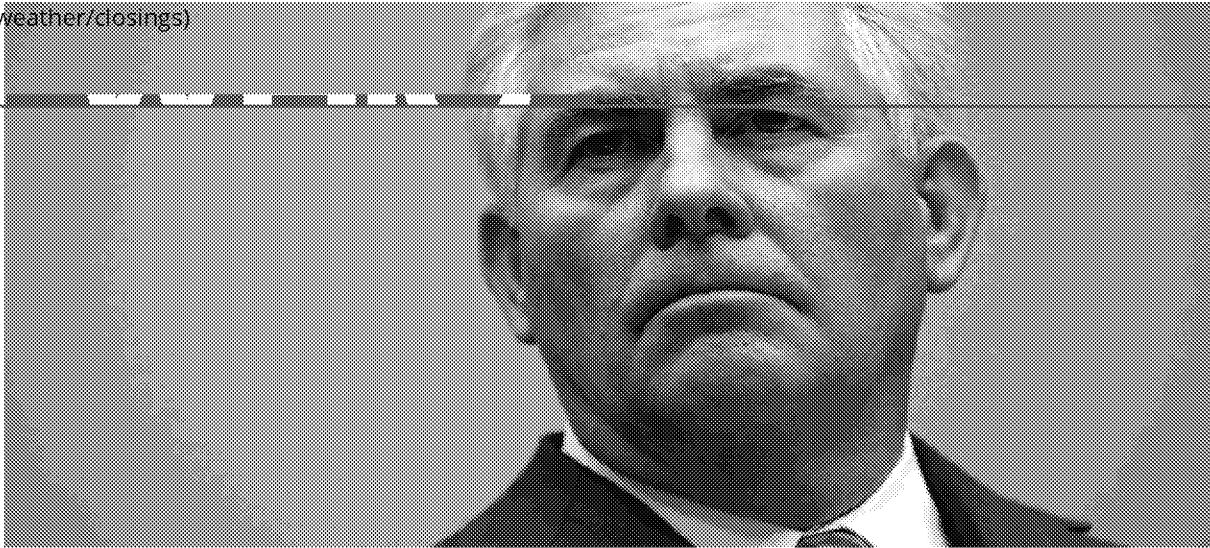
Published: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 6:29 AM

By: Joy Johnston - Cox Media Group National Content Desk

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President-elect Donald Trump announced early Tuesday that Exxon Chairman and CEO Rex Tillerson will be nominated for secretary of state. The report came just days after former New York City Mayor **Rudy Giuliani removed himself from consideration** (</news/news/national/donald-trumps-transition-latest-news/ntCB6/>) for the position. Giuliani had been on Trump's shortlist of secretary of state candidates, along with former Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

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(</list/news/national/more-news-headlines/ajz4/>)**1. Who is Tillerson?**

Tillerson, 64, was born in Texas. He received a civil engineering degree from the University of Texas. Tillerson resides in Texas and is married with four children.

2. How long has Tillerson worked for Exxon?

Tillerson has spent his entire career at Exxon. He was hired as an engineer by Exxon in 1975 and rose through the ranks, becoming CEO in 2006. He earned \$27 million in 2015. Exxon has a mandatory retirement age of 65.

3. What organizations is Tillerson involved with in his business and personal life?

According to his [Exxon biography page](http://corporate.exxonmobil.com/en/company/about-us/management/rex-w-tillerson) (<http://corporate.exxonmobil.com/en/company/about-us/management/rex-w-tillerson>) , Tillerson is a member of the American Petroleum Institute, the Society of Petroleum Engineers and the National Petroleum Council. He is also a member of the Business Roundtable and the Business Council, and a trustee of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, an honorary trustee of the Business Council for International Understanding, and a member of the Emergency Committee for American Trade. Tillerson was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 2013.

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Mr. Tillerson is a past national president of the Boy Scouts of America, a former United Negro College Fund director and is the vice-chairman of the Ford's Theatre Society.

4. What are Tillerson's political views?

A longtime Republican supporter, The Wall Street Journal reported that Tillerson supported Jeb Bush during the primaries, and did not donate to the Trump campaign. Tillerson's past public statements suggest that he is in favor of free trade and leery of government regulations and sanctions.

5. What are Tillerson's ties to Russia?

In 2011, Tillerson signed an agreement with Russia, worth up to \$300 billion, that allows ExxonMobil to drill in the offshore Arctic Kara Sea oil field, but the agreement hasn't taken affect due to U.S. sanctions against Russia over actions in Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin awarded Tillerson the Order of Friendship in 2013.

Trump declines daily intelligence briefings because he's 'a smart person'

Updated: Monday, December 12, 2016 @ 1:15 PM

Published: Monday, December 12, 2016 @ 1:09 PM

By: Theresa Seiger - Cox Media Group National Content Desk

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President-elect Donald Trump looks on during the DeltaPlex Arena, December 9, 2016 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. President-elect Donald Trump is continuing his victory tour across the country. (Photo by Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

Since he won the race to the White House last month, Donald Trump has declined to get daily intelligence briefings because he's "a smart person," the president-elect said Sunday.

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"I get it when I need it," Trump said in an interview with Fox News' Chris Wallace (<http://www.foxnews.com/transcript/2016/12/11/exclusive-donald-trump-on-cabinet-picks-transition-process/>). "You know, I'm like, a smart person. I don't have to be told the same thing and the same words every single day for the next eight years. It could be eight years – but eight years. I don't need that."

Trump's views are in contrast with his recent predecessors, who have generally received the highly classified president's daily brief on a regular basis, **Reuters reported** (<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-briefings-idUSKBN13X2M9>). However, Trump's stance isn't unique. David Priess, a former briefer for the CIA, told Reuters that President Richard Nixon accepted the president's daily brief only in paper form, and often returned them to intelligence officials unopened.

Trump told Wallace that his generals and Vice President-elect Mike Pence are also getting briefings. Unidentified sources told Reuters that the Indiana governor is getting intelligence briefings at least six days a week.

"And I'm being briefed also," Trump said. **First Baptist Church in Kettering** But if they're going to come in and tell me the exact same thing that they told me, you know, that doesn't change, necessarily. There might be times where it might change. I mean, there will be some very fluid situations. I'll be there not every day but more than that."

Trump's comments came as tension grows between the president-elect and the intelligence community, stemming from a recent CIA assessment that concluded with "high confidence" that Russia intervened in the election. Trump called the report "ridiculous" and said he believes that Democrats are pushing the report to soothe themselves after their defeat in November.

"I think it's just another excuse. I don't believe it," Trump said. "We had a massive landslide victory, as you know, in the Electoral College."

Trump won the Electoral College last month with 306 votes to Democratic rival Hillary Clinton's 232. However, Clinton won the popular vote by more than 2 million votes, according to The Associated Press.

"I think the Democrats are putting (the CIA assessment) out because they suffered one of the greatest defeats in the history of politics in this country," Trump said. "We ought to get back to making America great again, which is what we're going to do."

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4 million Americans could be drinking toxic water and would never know

BY LAURA UNGAR AND MARK NICHOLS

A USA TODAY NETWORK INVESTIGATION

Adam's parents didn't know about the danger until this fall.

Officials at City Hall knew long before then, according to local and state records. So did state and federal government regulators who are paid to make sure drinking water in Texas and across the nation is clean. Ranger and Texas officials were aware of a citywide lead problem for two years -- one the city still hasn't fixed and one the Waltons first learned about in a September letter to residents. The city and state even knew from recent tests, that water in the Walton family's cramped, one-bedroom rental house near the railroad tracks was carrying sky-high levels of lead.

Destiny and John Walton got their first inkling of a problem when blood tests in June detected high levels of lead in their sons' growing body. They first learned that their tap water contained lead — about 28 times the federal limit — when a USATODAY Network reporter told them in early November.

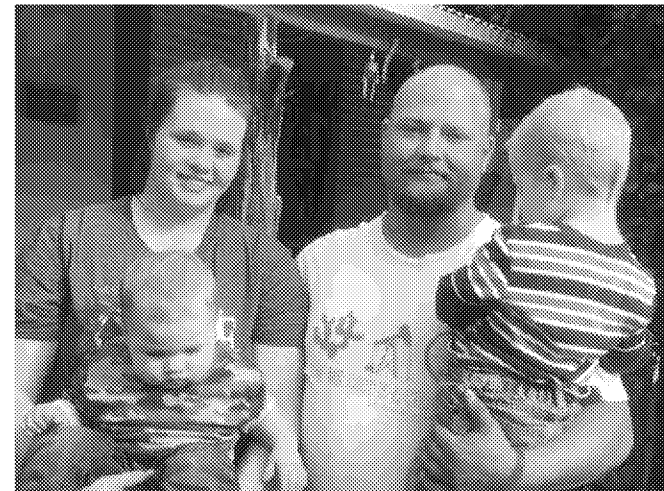
Millions of Americans face similar risks because the nation's drinking-water enforcement system doesn't make small utilities play by the same safety rules as everyone else, a USATODAY Network investigation has found.

Tiny utilities -- those serving only a few thousand people or less -- don't have to treat water to prevent lead contamination until after lead is found. Even when they skip safety tests or fail to treat water after they find lead, federal and state regulators often do not force them to comply with the law.

USATODAY Network journalists spent 2016 reviewing millions of records from the Environmental Protection Agency and all 50 states, visiting small communities across the country and interviewing more than 120 people stuck using untested or lead-tainted tap water.

The investigation found:

- About 100,000 people get their drinking water from utilities that discovered high lead but failed to treat the water to remove it. Dozens of utilities took more than a year to formulate a



Adam Walton, 2, in striped shirt, has high levels of lead in his blood. He lives with his mom, Destiny; dad, John; and brother Andrew, 1, in Ranger, Texas. The water supplying their house, background, tested high for lead.

(Photo: Laura Ungar, USA TODAY)

treatment plan and even longer to begin treatment.

- Some 4 million Americans get water from small operators who skipped required tests or did not conduct the tests properly violating a cornerstone of federal safe drinking water laws. The testing is required because, without it, utilities, regulators and people drinking the water can't know if it's safe. In more than 2,000 communities, lead tests were skipped more than once. Hundreds repeatedly failed to properly test for five or more years.
- About 850 small water utilities with a documented history of lead contamination — places where state and federal regulators are supposed to pay extra attention — have failed to properly test for lead at least once since 2010.

This two-tiered system exists in both law and practice. State and federal water-safety officials told USATODAY Network reporters that regulators are more lenient with small water systems because they lack resources, deeming some lost causes when they don't have the money, expertise or motivation to fix problems. The nation's Safe Drinking Water Act allows less-trained, often amateur people to operate tiny water systems even though the risks for people drinking the water are the same.

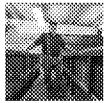
Officials in West Virginia, for example, labeled more than a dozen systems "orphans" because they didn't have owners or operators. Enforcement efforts for those utilities amounted to little more than a continuous stream of warning letters as utilities failed to test year after year. All the while, residents continued drinking untested — and potentially contaminated — water

"At the end of the day it creates two universes of people," said water expert Yanna Lambrinidou, an affiliate faculty member at Virginia Tech. "One is the universe of people who are somewhat protected from lead. ... Then we have those people served by small water systems, who are treated by the regulations as second-class citizens."

All of this endangers millions of people across the country, mostly in remote and rural communities. Utilities like East Mooringsport Water, serving part of a town of about 800 people, where drinking water went untested for more than five years. Or Coal Mountain, W.Va., a remote 118-person outpost where a retired coal miner pours bleach into untested water at the system's wellhead in hope of keeping it clean. Or Orange Center School outside Fresno, Calif., where for more than a decade regulators let about 320 grade-school kids drink water that had tested high for lead.

Individually the communities served by small utilities seem tiny. But together, the number of people getting lead-contaminated drinking water or water not properly tested for lead, since 2010 is about 5 million.

Virginia Tech's Marc Edwards, one of the nation's top experts on lead in drinking water who helped identify the crisis in Flint, Mich., laments that people in America's forgotten places — rural outposts, post-industrial communities and poor towns — are most at risk from the dangers of lead exposure, such as irreversible brain damage, lowered IQ, behavioral problems and language delays.



USA TODAY

Beyond Flint: Excessive lead levels found in almost 2,000 water systems across all 50 states

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/03/11/nearly-2000-water-systems-fail-lead-tests/81220466/>)

Edwards said the effects of lead poisoning could make it even more difficult for families in these communities to climb out of poverty. "I'm worried about their kids," he said. "The risk of permanent harm here is horrifying. These are America's children."

The Waltons fear lead has already harmed their son. At an age when other kids use dozens of words, Adam says just three: "mama," "dada" and "no." Destiny and John wish they would have known about the lead earlier so they could have protected him.

"What's going to happen if my son's lead levels keep rising? What if the kid next door gets way sicker than my son? What's Ranger going to do then?" Destiny asked. "They've known about it for years now ... Are they going to fix it?"



Tiny Flint

WHERE EVERYTHING BREAKS DOWN AT ONCE

Perhaps the best illustration of what can happen when everything breaks down at once is Ranger, where high lead and government inaction have converged in a pervasive contamination problem experts compared to a “tiny Flint.”

Ranger’s water system dates to the city’s heyday nearly 100 years ago, when the discovery of oil attracted a population that historians say reached 30,000. Ranger is now a barren place with 2,500 people, abandoned buildings and a lonely Main Street where a mural of a steer-wrangling cowboy near an oil well fades away like the city

With ever-shrinking tax rolls and median household income at about half the national average, there’s little money to shore up a decaying infrastructure. Leaks spring daily

Many residents rely on bottled water. They’ve heard through the grapevine that the city’s water might be unhealthy. They can see for themselves it’s not always clean. While lead is colorless and odorless, algae in the water is not.

“Some days, it’s more brown than green. It smells sort of like a sewer,” said Vietnam veteran Bill Brister, who spends about \$70 a month on bottled water. “We don’t even give the dogs tap water.”

Three years ago, the city found excessive levels of copper. Nine months after that, three of 20 sites tested over the limit of 15 parts per billion of lead. Under federal law, both required immediate action, but documents show the city waited until this fall to start planning to control corrosion. Testing this September found five sites above the limit for lead, the Winton home topping the list at 418 parts per billion. The federal limit is 15.

Similar scenarios play out in hundreds of mostly struggling communities — cities built on boom-bust industries like oil and coal, isolated rural places and mobile home parks housing the poorest people in town.

Ranger is one of about 130 water systems since 2010 that failed to take timely action, and one of dozens that took a year or more to start the treatment process.

City Manager Chad Roberts said Texas environmental officials pushed hard this fall after USA TODAY Network reporters visited Ranger and began asking questions. State officials insist the push came after a weekly review found that Ranger met EPA criteria for the state to take formal enforcement action.

Ranger took its first step toward reducing lead in November — nearly three years late — by giving the state a corrosion-control study that called for adjusting the pH of the water. State officials deemed the plan insufficient, however, and are working with the city to improve it.

As the city formulates its plan, residents continue to drink water that might be dangerous.

A boil notice was in effect in early November when Kay Hodges, 23, said she drank straight from the tap because she was nine months pregnant, dehydrated and out of bottled water. "I got really sick. I was throwing up all night," she said.

Hodges lives with her fiancé and young children in a low-income housing complex called Austin Acres. A tap at the complex has repeatedly tested high for lead, most recently at more than twice the federal limit. Hodges figures she should now get checked for the toxin.

Others fear lead exposure, too. Anita Baker, a 79-year-old colon cancer survivor in Austin Acres, has been using city water for cooking and making coffee but plans to stop after learning from a reporter that boiling the water concentrates the lead.

The Waltons — who squeeze into their one-bedroom home by putting the master bed in the living room — also drank lots of city water in iced tea, Kool-Aid, diluted juice and by itself. Adam's highest blood lead reading was more than three times the federal cutoff to be considered elevated, and his 1-year-old brother Andrew, also had slightly elevated lead levels.

Texas environmental officials say they have taken steps to speed Ranger's response. They sent experts to Ranger, referred the city to the EPA for formal enforcement in March, issued new citations in October and fined the city about \$3,000.

The city raised water rates to pay for improvements and now promises to replace more of the old water lines, increase testing and seek grants for more upgrades.

"We are good with the state right now," Mayor Joe Pilgrim said, "and that's all that matters."

Still, residents may have to wait years for clean water. After the state approves a reworked corrosion-control study, Ranger has two years before it must start treating its water. By then, Adam Walton will be almost ready for kindergarten.



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Double standard

PLAYING BY A DIFFERENT SET OF RULES

It's easy to see why a place like Ranger winds up with toxic water when you compare it to a typical large water system like the one in Louisville, Ky.

Louisville Water has about 435 full-time staffers, including a director of water quality and production with a Ph.D. in environmental engineering. Ranger has seven public works employees.

Louisville Water has an operating and maintenance budget of \$127 million. Ranger's entire city budget is \$3.2 million.

The top salary for water quality employees at Louisville Water is \$141,276. Most of Ranger's public works department employees earn from \$8.50 to \$12 an hour.

Some small utilities are even worse off.

In Colorado, near Black Canyon, the man in charge of providing safe water to 335 people is a farmer who spends most of his time tending to livestock, wheat, oats and barley.

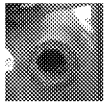
In West Texas, at Klondike Independent School District, water safety is handled by Superintendent Steve McLaren, whose first job is running a one-building school system serving 260 students. He wears many hats in the district amid cotton fields; he's been known to drive a school bus from time to time.

McLaren acknowledged he skipped required testing for lead and copper in fall 2014 because "some things just slip by." When Klondike did test last year, it found excessive lead in both rounds of testing.

Generally the bar for running tiny water systems is low. Certification for hands-on operators varies by state and typically involves passing an exam and getting ongoing continuing education credits. Some states require licensing but with varying qualifications. Minimum requirements in Texas, for instance, are a high school diploma or GED and a training course in basic water operations. No experience necessary.

"You might have to get more training to run a hot dog stand than a small water system," said Paul Schwartz with the Campaign for Lead Free Water, a group of people and organizations working to get lead out of drinking water.

Many states, and the EPA, offer extra guidance and instruction. But not everyone avails themselves of this help, leaving many small operators with "a complete lack of training," Lambrinidou said. "Sometimes, they're cheating and they don't know they're cheating."



USA TODAY

Some states, utilities balk at disclosing locations of lead water pipes

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/04/21/lead-water-service-line-location-transparency/83201228/>)

Some government funding is available for struggling utilities. EPA's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund which includes a state contribution, has provided \$32.5 billion through 2016 to water systems that applied for help. Another EPA program awards millions each year to non-profit organizations that provide training and technical assistance to small, public water systems. The U.S. Department of Agriculture also offers loans and grants.

Edwards and others say the need far outstrips the money and loans aren't helpful to utilities that can't pay them back. An EPA assessment from 2013 estimates infrastructure needs for small water systems will total \$64.5 billion over 20 years. The revolving fund's 2016 allocation, for systems of all sizes, was less than \$1 billion, and a Congressional Research Service report on the fund in November concluded that "a substantial gap remains between financing needs and available funds."

Recognizing resource constraints, the federal government lets small water systems play by more lenient rules.

Scattered throughout EPA regulations on lead and copper are specific provisions for small water systems. While utilities serving 50,000 or more people must always control corrosion, for example, smaller systems don't have to even plan for such treatment when lead is below the federal limit for two consecutive six-month periods. And they can discontinue treatment once lead drops below the limit.

Utilities serving 3,300 or fewer can, if they meet certain criteria, test for lead as little as once every nine years.

Experts say such regulations make it easy for lead problems to go undetected and uncorrected in the very places that are most vulnerable to contamination.

"You might think we have a lead in water lay Edwards said. "What we have is a national joke."



Untested water

4 MILLION LIVING WITH AN UNKNOWN

A cornerstone of those 25-year-old lead regulations is testing. But the ~~USA~~ TODAY Network found that 9,000 small water systems together serving almost 4 million people failed to test properly for lead in the past six years, meaning the toxin could be there without anyone knowing. More than a quarter of those systems had repeat lead-testing violations.

EPA acknowledges it gives higher priority to immediate public health issues like acute contamination than testing violations.

Money is a factor in skipping lead tests, which can cost around \$50 per tap. Utilities must test from five to 20 locations, depending on how many customers they serve. ~~A~~ USA TODAY Network analysis found it would cost about \$1.2 million to check the water served by every small utility that failed to test twice since 2010. Lead testing for every small water utility that missed even one test would cost around \$5 million.



USA TODAY

Lead taints drinking water in hundreds of schools, day cares across USA

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2016/03/17/drinking-water-lead-schools-day-cares/81220916/>)

Ranger admits in a letter to residents to three years of skipped or incomplete tests. Roberts, who started as city manager in the spring, blamed lack of expertise and previous neglect, saying “the ball got dropped for sure.”

It also got dropped at Orange Center School in California, which skipped testing for nine years — even after finding excessive lead in 2003. In the rural neighborhood outside Fresno, officials in charge let the kids keep drinking the water for more than a decade.

State officials threatened to fine the school, but records show no more lead tests were done until 2012 and no action was taken. Three of those tests again found high lead. Two more years went by before California officials ordered the school to stop using the water and began shipping bottled water to students, while the school waits to be connected to the much-larger Fresno water system.

Customers of East Mooringsport Water in Louisiana, are also waiting to hook up to a larger water system after at least five years of skipped tests.

“Honestly, we just didn’t have the money to do (testing),” said Edward “Pat” Turnley, who distributes monthly water bills to the 90 East Mooringsport customers. “We’re barely hanging on here.”

The state cracked down several times, ordering the district to test three years ago and fining the community more than \$43,500. But little changed. Finally in late June, the state tested nine homes itself, and found lead contamination in two. More testing will need to be done to determine the extent of the problem.



Resident Larry Free worries about the East Mooringsport Water system in Louisiana, which hadn't been tested for lead in at least five years until this summer. "I don't trust this water. I thought they were taking care of it. They haven't," he said.

(Photo: Henrietta Wildsmith, The Times)

East Mooringsport buys treated water from the nearby town of Blanchard, then stores it in old tanks. Resident Gladys McCauslin suspects sediment in the tanks is what makes her tap water brownish and gritty. Residents are warned to boil it before drinking or cooking.

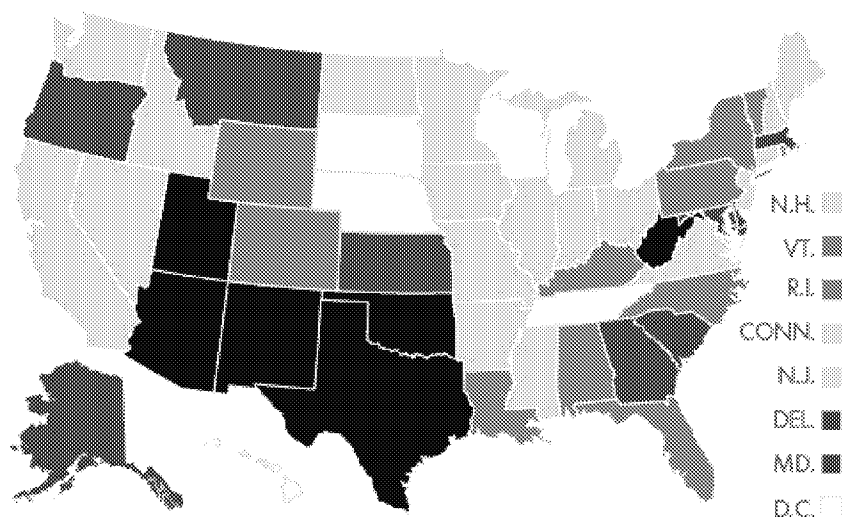
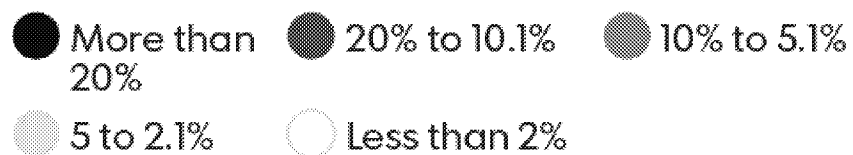
“It makes me feel like I’m in a Third World country,” said McCauslin, 75.

McCauslin hopes things will change when Blanchard, which has a new \$17 million water treatment plant, acquires her community’s water system. As she waits for the merger, she keeps doing what she’s done for years — paying the bill for untested tap water while shelling out extra money for bottled water to drink and filtered, purified water for bathing.

Residents in remote Coal Mountain, W.Va., have gone as long as anyone can remember with untested, questionable water. No one knows what contaminants it might contain.

CUSTOMERS DRAWING WATER FROM UTILITIES WITH FAILED LEAD TESTS

Percentage of each state's small water-utility customers who draw water from a system that has failed to properly test for lead since 2010:



SOURCE EPA Safe Drinking Water Information System database reports, Q3, 2016
Isabella Lucy, USA TODAY



Orphan systems

REGULATORS HAVE GIVEN UP ON SOME PLACES

Their wellhead is housed near a church, in a shed cluttered with empty bleach bottles. They've been left behind by Ravin Kenneda, a 65-year-old with a salt-and-pepper mustache and a baseball cap, who pours bleach into his community's water once in a while to keep it clean.

"It's just stuff I've learned down through the years," he said from his front-porch swing as his granddaughter sipped bottled water.

Though he's no water expert, he concedes, "Someone's got to do it."

State and federal governments have pretty much given up on enforcing safe-drinking-water rules here and in similarly tough cases, leaving residents to fend for themselves.

Coal Mountain's tap water comes from a coal company well abandoned in the 1980s. Water is pumped up the mountainside to an old storage tank hidden amid tangled trees, then flows down to homes. It's the subject of 19 water-testing violations since 1988, the most in the nation.

"We don't know what's in it," said Mila Darnell, 62, who is raising two 17-year-old grandsons with her retired coal miner husband. "I'm very concerned about lead or whatever else could be in there."

A small shed houses components of the water system for Coal Mountain in a remote corner of West Virginia.

(Photo: Jasper Colt, USA TODAY)

No doubt something is awry; the water stains the Darnells' clothes, stops up their shower head and sometimes smells like fish. Although they won't drink it, they do use it for cooking — boiling it first and hoping no one gets sick.

West Virginian officials say they can't do much beyond sending out advisories and issuing notices about water-testing violations because Coal Mountain has no owner or operator. The state labels Coal Mountain and about 15 other utilities "orphan systems."

"This happens, actually across the country. We try to work with them, but the problem is finding someone who's responsible," said Walter Ivey, director of the West Virginia health department's Office of Environmental Health Services.

One option is for states to test the water. But Jon Capacasa, director of EPA's Region 3 Water Protection Division, said that the law calls for utilities to monitor for lead and report results to states, and that the obligation lies with them.

When utilities can't or won't, however, they often face little if any real punishment.

Notices and orders were EPA's weapons against Coal Mountain's lead-testing violations for five years — after which nothing changed and West Virginia asked that no further federal action be taken.

Water-quality advocates say residents deserve better

Kailyn Brooke Taylor, 5, of Coal Mountain, W.Va., drinks bottled water because their tap water might be unsafe.

(Photo: Jasper Colt, USA TODAY)

Government "owes it to these people to at least provide clean drinking water," said Wyoming County Clerk Mike Goode, adding that the county is working on a proposal to help Coal Mountain. "It's bad. These people live in America. They have a right to good water."

But Mila Darnell laments that such rights don't always extend to poor, rural Americans like her.

"We're a forgotten people," she said. "It hurts to feel ... like you just don't count."

'No responsible party'

ACCOUNTABLE OFFICIALS MINIMIZING DANGER

Roberts, the city manager, downplayed the danger from Range's water. Roberts said small children and pregnant women probably shouldn't drink it (as the city said in a letter to residents). He said overall, "I don't see a problem with drinking (it.) I drink it. ... I don't think it's a health alert serious enough for an emergency."

Roberts blamed much of the lead problem on homeowners' pipes, although he acknowledged the city's distribution system contains lead pipes as well.

Pilgrim, Range's mayor, agreed the water isn't unsafe, saying his city "has never put any of their people in danger ... It's not an ongoing medical disaster to anyone in town for any reason."

They are far from the only officials to minimize water problems.

Kentucky's Peter Goodmann, who directs the division of water there, used a similar rationale to defend many years of inaction when a tiny water system without an owner refused to test for contaminants. "There's not much we could do because there's no responsible party," Goodmann said of Kettle Island Water, which was recently downgraded from a public water system because it's gotten so small. "Nobody's dying there, and there doesn't seem to be any public health effects."

Ranger, Texas, City Manager Chad Roberts says state environmental officials pushed hard for action on the city's water problems this fall after USA TODAY Network reporters visited the town and began asking questions.

(Photo: Laura Ungar, USA TODAY)

The EPA would not allow senior officials including Peter Grevatt, director of the Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water, to be interviewed. The agency would respond only in writing to questions, saying it is revising lead regulations, working with states to strengthen protections and oversight, and remains committed to "vigorous civil and criminal enforcement to protect public health." On Nov 30, the EPA released a drinking water "action plan" that includes proposed steps to help tiny water utilities comply with the drinking water laws, such as guidance to help them find money for needed improvements and updated certification guidelines for people operating them.



USA TODAY

Here's what EPA says it's doing about lead in tap water

SHARE

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/12/13/heres-what-epa-says-s-doing-lead-tap-water/94812122/>)

For now, lead continues to taint tap water in places like Range. Katelyn Peters, who lives next door to the Waltons, doesn't see anything changing soon.

"This is where I was raised. This is where I was planning on raising my kids," she said, watching three of her four kids chase each other in the front yard, wondering if the water could be slowly poisoning the town's kids. "Now, I'm terrified. I would live anywhere else."

Contributing: Lex Talamo of The Shreveport (La.) Times and Caitlin McGlade.

Talamo reported from Mooringsport, La. McGlade reported from Ranger, Tex.

Nichols reported from Indianapolis. Ungar reported from Range, Coal Mountain, W.Va., and Louisville.



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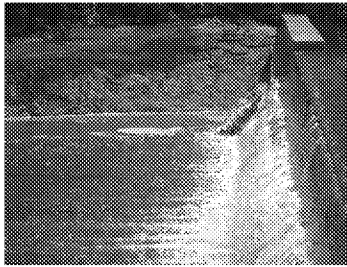
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EPA weighs in on Dripping Springs wastewater permit

Erica Proffer , KVUE 10:09 PM. CST December 12, 2016



DRIPPING SPRINGS, TEXAS - The EPA told the state of Texas they are concerned with how the state would allow dripping springs to discharge its wastewater.

They stated issues in a letter to TCEQ
(<https://www.scribd.com/document/334045141/Dripping-Springs-City-of-TX0136778-Interim-Objection-Letter-Final-2>)
and asked for more information.

"The letter is called an interim objection. It is considered EPA comments to the proposed permits, not opposition. The state reviews those comments and makes a final decision on the permit. The state must issue a final permit that meets the requirements of federal law," said David Gray, EPA Office of External Affairs Director in an email.

This is not a formal objection.

"EPA only issues a formal objection if the final permit doesn't meet federal law. In that case, the state must correct the permit to meet federal law or EPA can issue the permit," said Gray.

The discharge permit is to allow treated wastewater to be discharged into a creek which flows toward Onion Creek.

Downstream, Onion Creek contains recharge zones for our aquifers.

It's considered sensitive because the creek water goes into the aquifer with little filtration.

TCEQ wouldn't say what they'll do exactly about this letter. They told KVUE they're evaluating it.

"EPA's review and comment on certain applications is part of the regular permitting process. The TCEQ is currently evaluating the EPA objection letter and cooperatively working with EPA to address the issues included in the letter. TCEQ will address the issues in a written response to EPA. Concurrently with the response to EPA, TCEQ will be evaluating numerous written comments received during the public comment period as well as oral comments received at the public meeting held on November 10, 2016. After the issues are resolved, the TCEQ will move the application and draft permit to the next stage of the permitting process and mail out the response to comments," said TCEQ Spokeswoman Andrea Morrow in an email.

This is a typical process for issuing permits.

"When the state proposes a permit, EPA has 45 days to review and comment on water permits proposed by the state. The letter is our comments on the TPDES permit – which is a new permit to build a wastewater treatment plant," said Gray. "I understand that there has been community interest in the state's permit and future plant. The next step is for the state to review our comments and propose their final permit. I cannot speculate on that outcome."

The KVUE defenders covered this topic in-depth. Watch the full report [here](http://www.kvue.com/news/investigations/defenders/the-dirty-truth-about-texas-water/342366238) (<http://www.kvue.com/news/investigations/defenders/the-dirty-truth-about-texas-water/342366238>).

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Oklahoma Lawmakers Consider Selling Power Plants To Fill Budget Hole

DECEMBER 12, 2016 | 2:21 PM

BY LOGAN LAYDEN

Oil prices are on the rebound, which should eventually generate revenue and help Oklahoma's state budget situation. Still, another budget hole ~~that could be as large as \$600 million~~ — will likely have to be filled during the 2017 legislative session. One emerging idea that could put an extra billion dollars in state coffers: Selling the Grand River Dam Authority

eCapitol reports newly appointed House Appropriations and Budget Chair Leslie Osborn and Senate Majority Floor Leader Greg Reat intend to introduce a bill to clear a path for the sale of GRDAs assets, like its hydroelectric dams.

"This is not necessarily a bill to sell the GRDA," said Osborn, R-Mustang. But during tough budget times, we need to have a plan in place should the need arise. We have several assets that are not a core function of state government. The GRDA could be worth more than a billion dollars, and it would be imprudent for the Legislature to not consider creative ways to raise money to fund core services. This legislation does not mandate a sale; it

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LOGAN LAYDEN / STATEIMPACT OKLAHOMA

The Grand River Dam Authority's coal-fired plant in Chouteau, Okla.

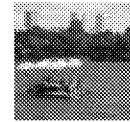
enables the state to sell the asset if it was decided it was in the best interest of the state and its citizens."

The GRDA is a state-owned, non-appropriated, non-profit utility that provides power to northeast Oklahoma from three hydroelectric power plants at Grand Lake and Lake Hudson, as well as a coal-fired power plant near Chouteau, Oklahoma.

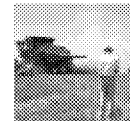
GRDA also has important water distribution monitoring duties, and a **StateImpact** reported last spring, just absorbed the responsibilities of the now-defunct Scenic Rivers Commission, which was charged with preserving and policing some of Oklahoma's most **sensitive and economically vital waterways**. It's unclear how the privatization of the agency would affect the state's six scenic rivers.

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A bill has not been filed, but there's already pushback to the idea. On Monday Rep. David Perryman, D-Chickasha, released a statement warning that the sale of the GRDA could spell economic doom for northeastern Oklahoma's economy:

The GRDA is not only an essential supplier of electricity for 24 counties in Oklahoma and in three other states, it keeps the price of power affordable in a depressed region that needs that edge for economic and community development. In addition, the GRDA manages water consumption by 700,000 people, irrigation, navigation and recreation. It invests in water quality, fish and wildlife enhancement, public safety, lake patrols, land use management and air quality improvements. It is much more than an "asset" to be sold to fill a budget gap.

The Grand River Dam Authority is working like it was designed to work and its sale has the potential of rendering devastation to the economy of northeastern Oklahoma.

Perryman points out this isn't the first time selling the GRDA has been floated as a way to generate more money for the state. In 2013, Gov. Mary Fallin formed a task force to study its sale, and failed bills in the 2015 and 2016 legislative sessions would have **authorized the sale of the agency's property and diverted some of GRDA's revenue** to the state.

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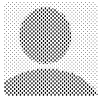
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50-foot dredging depth proposed for parts of lower Mississippi River



By [Mark Schleifstein, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune](#)

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on December 12, 2016 at 10:38 AM, updated December 12, 2016 at 8:12 PM

Portions of the **Mississippi River's main ship navigation channel**, including stretches between Southwest Pass and the river's mouth and between **New Orleans** and **Baton Rouge**, would be deepened to 50 feet under a plan and environmental assessment recently released by the Army Corps of Engineers. That's three to five feet deeper than present.

The project would allow access to the ports of **Plaquemines**, **New Orleans** and **South Louisiana** by the new, larger "**Panamax**" ocean-going vessels that were built with much more cargo capacity to take advantage of the expansion and deepening of the Panama Canal. Other U.S. ports on the Gulf, East and West coasts either already have completed similar navigation channel deepening projects or are trying to get them approved.

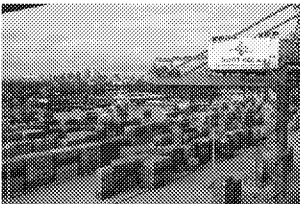


Corps to study deepening Mississippi River ship channel

The increased depth will reduce the need to load some ships with less cargo weight than their size allows, or to unload cargo from ships before they enter the river's mouth. Officials also hope that the deeper dredging will increase the intervals between required maintenance dredging.

The deepening project would have an initial construction cost of \$88.9 million, of which the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development would have to pay \$22.2 million. The state's share includes \$2.5 million to acquire land and easements, move underground pipelines or other utilities and dispose of any hazardous materials found during construction.

The corps estimates that maintaining and operating the deeper channel will cost about \$21.6 million a year, all would be paid by the federal government, and the net annual benefits to the U.S. economy at \$96.8 million. In a study recommending deepening, the corps said it would result in a national economic benefits to cost ratio of about 5.47 to 1.



What is the future of the Port of New Orleans?

The southernmost part of the project is between river mile 14 above Head of Passes near **Venice** and mile 22 below Head of Passes, at the river's mouth. The portion of the river below Head of Passes is Southwest Pass.

The navigation channel in that area would be officially deepened from the present 48 feet below its lowest low-water level -- during lowest tidal levels -- to 50 feet, but in reality it would be 54 feet in the beginning. That's because the dredging also would include 2 feet of "advanced maintenance" and 2 feet of allowed "overdepth", both aimed at increasing the time between required maintenance dredging.

The deepening project could take as long as four years to complete and produce about 18 million cubic yards of sediment. The sediment could be sent away "beneficial use" such as creating wetlands, under federal rules that require the corps to limit the amount of added cost to transport sediment away from the channel.

Wetlands could benefit

The corps expects to create 1,462 1/2 acres, or more than 2 1/4 square miles -- of new wetlands in the federal **Delta National Wildlife Refuge** and the state **Pass A Loutre Wildlife Management Area**, both on the east side of the river near Head of Passes. The corps now has access to 143,264 acres in the area for disposal of material dredged from the southern part of the river to meet the present 48-foot depth, and it expects to add 24,054 acres for the new dredging project.

The corps study cites the wetland creation program as a major benefit of the project to offset its other environmental effects.

"The creation of marsh would provide an increase in fish and wildlife habitat including nesting habitat for water fowl and nursery habitat for fish," the report said. "Consumptive recreation use would likely increase as a result of an increase in quality and quantity of fish and wildlife habitat. Bird watching opportunities are also expected to increase because of improved habitat for neo-tropical migratory songbirds."

But dredging has its downsides. The study says increased saltwater intrusion caused by the deeper channel and by relative sea level rise will likely result in a loss of more than 833 1/2 acres of the new wetlands over 50 years, based on loss rates for the area between 1932 and 2010.

"However, it is anticipated that the proposed project would not result in overall adverse direct or secondary impacts to the aquatic environment and human environment in or near the project area," the report said.

Louisiana could pay more money to move dredged sediment moved farther away, to areas identified by the state as more in need of wetland restoration. But there are no current plans to do so, said Bren Haase, head of the state Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority's coastal master plan planning team.

Congress has authorized and appropriated \$100 million for beneficial use dredging, as part of the 2004 Louisiana Coastal Area Ecosystem Restoration Study. That money could be used to extend the distance of pumping the dredged material. But state officials have refused to use that money for areas in lowermost **Plaquemines Parish** because they think the money can be better matched with other dredging elsewhere, where the material can be put to better use in protecting inland populated areas.

The corps report said some possible environmental effects of dredging, including noise, will be avoided by requiring contractors to limit operations when some endangered species such as manatees might be in the area, or by delaying dredging or other operations in the case of nearby bird rookeries.

Saltwater wedge

The lower river project must also take into account the need for the corps to build an underwater berm downriver of Plaquemines Parish water intakes during very low river periods. The berms would be designed to block salt water from entering Plaquemines' intakes and those of upriver water systems.

The wedge of salt water in the river is present throughout the year in Southwest Pass. But it moves upriver when there's not enough freshwater carried by the river to keep the wedge from moving north. The corps report says present research indicates there won't be an increase in the number of times the corps must build the underwater sill, which now averages every 10 years.

The portion of the river between mile 14 above Head of Passes and the Bonnet Carre Spillway in **St. Charles Parish** already is deeper than 50 feet, much deeper in some parts. In the Port of New Orleans, for example, the bottom of the navigation channel can be as deep as 200 feet below the normal lowest surface of the water.

However, the Port of New Orleans has requested that access ways between wharves on the river's east bank and the channel be deepened to 50 feet, to take advantage of the new depth at the mouth of the river. While that's not included in the current corps plan, language approving that proposal is included in a water projects bill under final consideration in the Senate.

Kenner-Baton Rouge dredging

The second area that is part of the corps-recommended deepening project stretches from just south of the Port of Baton Rouge to **Kenner**. This includes the Port of South Louisiana.

The project calls for deepening three "river crossings," the straight reaches of the river between river bends, with the sediment deposited in deeper water areas just downstream.

The crossings are:

- Fairview, between river miles 111 and 117 adjacent to **Luling**
- Belmont, between river miles 151 and 156 and adjacent to Oak Alley in **St. James Parish**
- Rich Bend, between river miles 155 and 160 near **Convent** in **St. James Parish**.

The corps estimates that about 616,600 cubic yards of sediment will be dredged from these three crossings over two years. Once the work is finished, the average annual maintenance within those crossings would increase by about 3.1 million cubic yards, again with the material disposed just downriver of each in deeper water.

State officials agree with the corps that this disposal method makes sense. That's because the cost of either moving the material by barge downstream or by trucks to other locations to rebuild wetlands would be cost prohibitive.

In choosing its recommended plan, the corps rejected a no-action plan, which would have kept some existing depths and increased others to 48 feet. It also rejected plans that would have included another nine river crossings north of the ones in the preferred, to let deeper-draft ships to reach the Port of Baton Rouge.

The current corps proposal would be the third change in the river's navigation channel depths since Congress in 1985 authorized the agency to deepen the channel to 55 feet between the river's mouth and Baton Rouge in 1985. The first phase completed in December 1987 deepened the river from 40 feet to 45 feet between the Gulf of Mexico and **Donaldsonville**, at river mile 181. The second phase, completed in December 1994, deepened the river from 40 feet to 45 feet between Donaldsonville and Baton Rouge.

The state transportation department, as the local sponsor, limited the corps' options for this third phase to those including the 50-foot depth. Deeper dredging was not considered by the state because it would have significantly added to the project's cost, and for other considerations. But it could be reconsidered in the future.

Public review, input

A copy of the full report, including 10 appendices, is available at the **corps' web site.**

The public has through Jan. 17 to comment on the plan by:

- Calling 504.862.2517
- Emailing MRSCdmin@usace.army.mil
- Mailing U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, CEMVN-PD, Attn: Steve Roberts, 7400 Leake Ave., New Orleans 70118.

Questions about the project may be submitted to Steve Roberts of the corps' environmental compliance branch by e-mail at steve.w.roberts@usace.army.mil or by telephone at 504.862.2517 or facsimile at 504.862.2088.

A decision by the corps' New Orleans District commander on the plan is expected by March, followed by the release of a feasibility design for the plan in September and a "director's report" by the chief of the corps. The director's report is to be submitted to Congress in March 2018.

A public hearing on the dredging plan is scheduled Wednesday (Dec. 14) 10 a.m. to noon in the corps' District Assembly Room, 7400 Leake Ave., New Orleans.

.....

CORRECTION: *An earlier version of this story included an incorrect amount of money that the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development would pay for the proposed dredging.*

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WATER POLLUTION

EPA turns down \$20.4M in Gold King disaster requests

Published: Monday , December 12, 2016

U.S. EPA said Friday it will pay \$4.5 million to state, local and tribal governments in relation to the 2015 Gold King mine disaster , but rejected \$20.4 million in other requests related to the spill.

An EPA-led crew triggered the 3-million-gallon spill from the inactive mine in Colorado while doing cleanup work. The toxic wastewater traveled into rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.

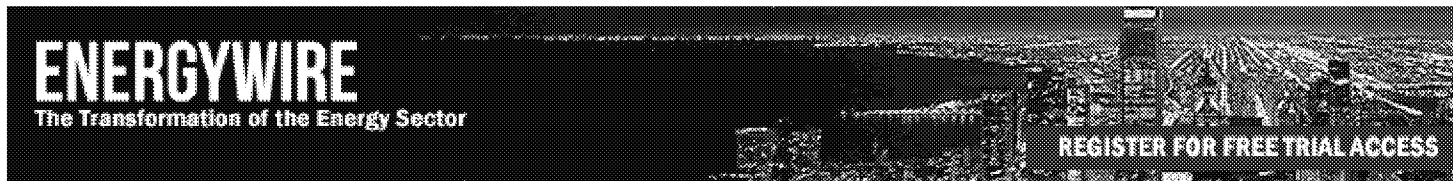
Last week, the Navajo Nation filed a separate claim for \$162 million in previous and future costs related to the spill ([Greenwire](#), Dec. 6). EPA's documents, however , listed the Navajo Nation as requesting only \$1.4 million and planned to reimburse \$603,000 of that. The difference in figures could not be immediately reconciled.

EPA's decision can be appealed. No governments indicated on Friday whether they would do so.

La Plata County in Colorado may decide this week. EPA repaid the county about \$377,000, but County Manager Joe Kerby said he thinks the agency owes it an additional \$29,000.

"It's not a huge amount, but it's actual cost that we incurred and that our taxpayers paid for because of the spill, through no fault of our own," he said (Dan Elliott, [AP/Denver Post](#), Dec. 9). — CS

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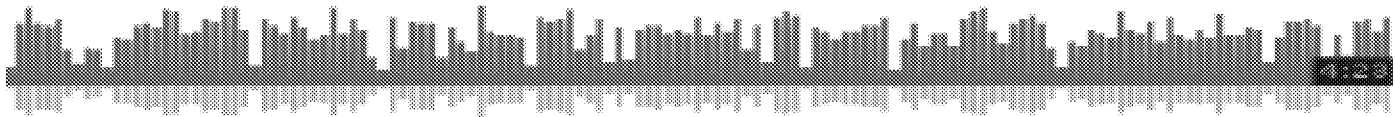
The project could be the biggest water deal in North America.

Texas Standard

Fort Stockton Has a Surplus of Aquifer Water and the City Wants to Sell It

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By Rhonda Fanning & Alexandra Hart | December 12, 2016 3:18 pm

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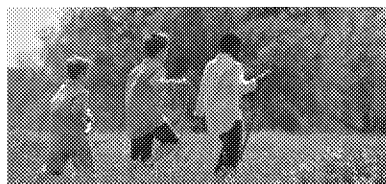
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Asher Price/Austin American-Statesman

Water system builder Alan Murphy is partnering with Fort Stockton to create a plan to sell its water.



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Fort Stockton is partnering with local water system builders to quench the collective thirst of communities and cities across west Texas and as far as Austin. The project would tap aquifers underneath the city to sell to places that need long-term solutions to Texas' water problem.

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Agricultural property owners are now trying to export the water they've been using to grow their crops. And they've got some support.

"The city, which has resisted some efforts to export water, is now basically getting in the game," Price says. "There is a lot of potential for a lot of money. They're talking about selling it to cities as far away as San Angelo, Odessa, Midland — so some of these are hundreds of miles away. And the idea is to provide water to those cities when they need it."

The plan does not yet have an infrastructure for pumping and transporting the mass quantities of water it's proposing to sell. Price says it might be a few years before the plan takes shape — and a couple of hundreds of millions of dollars. But the city is playing the long-game.

"So you have these water developers going out, trying to find financing for a project that may or may not ever happen," Price says.

Post by Beth Cortez-Neavel.

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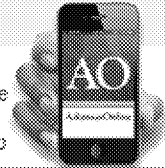
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Watershed meetings under

By Emily Walkenhorst

This article was published December 12, 2016 at 2:29 a.m.

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MARSHALL — About 100 people attended the first public meeting of an 18-month process to create a watershed management plan for the Buffalo River last week.

Many of them — farmers, neighbors and outsiders who love the Buffalo — agreed on some of the same concerns for the river: too much gravel in the river, failing septic tanks, erosion. Many also agreed that research on the area's lagging economy should be done before a management plan is finalized, and many agreed that education and cooperation between all levels of government and locals is important.

They disagreed on other issues: whether agriculture poses a threat, and whether visitors contribute to degradation of the river. Some expressed concerns about whether the management plan would consider all the relevant players in the watershed and be fair to everyone, and whether the management plan would ever become more regulatory than voluntary.

FTN Associates, an Arkansas environmental engineering firm, held the public meeting Thursday morning at the Searcy County Civic Center gymnasium, the first of six public meetings on the proposed watershed-management plan. Hired by the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, the firm has handled watershed-management plans in other parts of Arkansas, in Mississippi and in West Virginia.

The plans always outline recommended voluntary actions for watershed management, FTN Systems Ecologist Kent Thornton told Thursday's group. None have ever become regulatory.

The purpose of a watershed-management plan is to outline conservation recommendations and make watershed landowners available for U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant funds to implement those recommendations, Thornton said.

Allen Brown, environmental program coordinator for the commission, described Thursday's meeting as a "fact-finding mission" to gauge people's concerns for the river.

"We got some pretty good responses from landowners as far as what they want to address," Brown said, adding that people had some common themes in their concerns.

But the ways issues may be addressed are myriad, Brown said, and would be a part of the discussion during the development process for the management plan.

The Buffalo River watershed spans hundreds of square miles in mostly Newton and Searcy counties. Parts of the watershed extend into Marion, Baxter, Stone, Van Buren and Pope counties.

A watershed is an area surrounding a body of water that eventually drains into the body of water. The watershed management plan would be intended for all 150 miles of the river, not just the 135 miles that are designated as the Buffalo National River by the National Park Service.

The plan will not consider facilities that have Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality permits because the commission has no authority over those, Thornton told the crowd.

Gordon Watkins, a Jasper cattle farmer and president of the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance, expressed concern that his nonpermitted cattle farm would be subject to more scrutiny than a permitted hog farm during the watershed-management plan development process.

FTN Associates will host additional meetings about every three months during the watershed-management plan development process. Thornton said he expects to hold the next meeting at the end of March.

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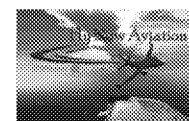
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Funds for the plan came from a \$107,000 grant from the EPA. The plan is a part of the state's larger Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee — a committee created by Gov. Asa Hutchinson that comprises five state agencies and will include public meetings and stakeholder input. That committee will meet for the first time in January, officials have said, although no date has been set.

There was little mention Thursday of C&H Hog Farms in Mount Judea — the only federally classified “large” hog farm in the watershed. The farm has drawn opposition for about the past four years because of the perceived risk it poses to the river, and that opposition has been the catalyst for research at the farm and regulation changes, including a temporary ban on medium and large hog farms in the watershed pending certain research results.

But agriculture and whether the management plan would address it were among the major concerns expressed Thursday.

Niagle Ratchford, Mike Love and Billy Ragland — all farmers — said they attended Thursday's meeting to learn more about the development process for the management plan and make sure it weighed all stakeholders' input evenly.

“I just want to see it's done fairly,” said Ragland, a cattle and hay farmer just north of Marshall.

Love, a hay farmer, said he was concerned about any possible government control of land that wouldn't benefit the environment. He said he didn't want to see regulations turn the area back into forestland, arguing that farming and timber were both major industries to the area.

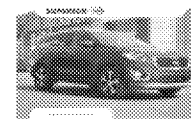
Twin brothers Larry and Garry Lilley, who live outside of the watershed but are frequent visitors to the Buffalo River, noted the great economic impact of both tourism and trout fishing in the watershed and said their top concern was seeing C&H shut down.

Sara Thorne, a member of the White River chapter of Trout Unlimited, said she's concerned for Buffalo River tourism, which she described as a major industry in the watershed.

Thorne said Thursday's meeting was informative and helped familiarize people with the development process for a watershed management plan.

Thorne said she hopes the process will consider groups in the watershed that would be willing to help implement it and the pollution risk posed by animal farms and associated fertilizer runoff. She's also concerned about erosion and wants to see more measures taken to prevent it.

“You've got to get involved in taking care of this stuff,” she said.



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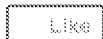
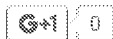
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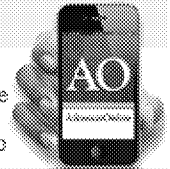
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After years of drama, farmers score a big win in California water battle



Boxer filibusters a bill rider she calls 'awful' 3:34



1 of 2



BY MICHAEL DOYLE

mdoyle@mcclatchydc.com



WASHINGTON — The California water bill now ready for the president's signature dramatically shifts 25 years of federal policy and culminates a long and fractious campaign born in the drought-stricken San Joaquin Valley.

A rough five years in the making, the \$558 million bill approved by the Senate early Saturday morning steers more water to farmers, eases dam construction, and funds desalination and recycling projects. Its rocky road to the White House also proved a costly master class in political persistence and adroit maneuvering.

“I believe these provisions are both necessary, and will help our state,” said Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

Feinstein and House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield, and their staffs, crafted the final water package, which the Senate approved on a 78-21 vote. They also made the hard-ball tactical choice to fold it into a widely popular infrastructure bill, which eased Senate passage while it left retiring Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer fuming.

“I think it is absolutely a horrible process, a horrible rider,” Boxer said during floor debate Friday. “It’s going to result in pain and suffering among our fishing families.”

Boxer cited, in particular, California’s salmon industry, whose members fear the diversion of water will deplete rivers critical to salmon reproduction.

Boxer’s post-midnight vote against the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, which included the approximately 98-page California bill, was likely to be the last of her 33-year congressional career. It was a sour ending for her long-time Senate partnership with Feinstein, with whom she’s amicably served since 1993.

Though ultimately futile, Boxer’s stand against the California water bill also foreshadows some of the big challenges ahead once the legislation takes effect. These include healing the rifts that have pit one region of the state against the other, managing the new Trump administration’s implementation of the law and coping with the inevitable litigation.

“It’s ugly, and it’s wrong, and it’s going to be a disaster,” Boxer said. ***This site is restricted to conserve EPA network resources for business activities.***

This year’s final California water package includes many elements, some of which are not especially controversial.

CALIFORNIA IS NOW ENTERING INTO OUR SIXTH YEAR OF DROUGHT. . . AND THE EFFECTS OF THE DROUGHT HAVE BEEN DEVASTATING.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.

Non-native predatory fish in the Stanislaus River will be test-targeted for elimination. Money will support water recycling projects in cities such as Sacramento and San Luis Obispo, and to desalination projects like ones proposed for Southern California.

More controversially, the bill streamlines potential construction approval of Western water projects that could include Temperance Flat on the San Joaquin River and Sites Reservoir in the Sacramento Valley. The bill's funding includes \$335 million for the water storage projects, which is only a fraction of their total cost.

With highly technical but important language, the bill also directs the pumping of more water to farms south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and seeks to ensure that Sacramento Valley farmers receive all of their allocated water.

"This water is for the tens of thousands of small farms that have gone bankrupt, like a melon farmer who sat in my office with tears in his eyes," Feinstein said.

Boxer, echoing environmentalists, countered that the real beneficiary will be "big agribusiness."

All sides agree the California water package marks the biggest federal shift in the state's water use since the 1992 Central Valley Project Improvement Act, which focused more on protecting the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Farmers hated the CVPIA but, in a mirror image of this year's water bill, it was included in a bigger package that rolled right over one of the state's protesting senators.

The Republican senator who was left standing alone in fighting the 1992 bill, John Seymour, was subsequently defeated by Feinstein. One of the other big losers in that earlier legislative fight, the Westlands Water District, is among the victors in this year's bill, after spending more than \$1 million on lobbying in the last two years.

 **IT'S GOING TO RESULT IN PAIN AND SUFFERING AMONG OUR FISHING FAMILIES.**
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Other California water districts, farmer organizations and environmental groups poured resources into trying to shape the final bill. Feinstein stressed that she went through "dozens of versions" and consulted extensively with both the Obama administration and state officials to craft the legislation.

House Republicans, in turn, kept the pressure on by repeatedly passing more aggressive California water bills. These competing measures, led first in 2011 by Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Tulare, and then by Rep. David Valadao, R-Hanford, kept presenting Feinstein with an issue that would not go away.

Last year, for instance, Feinstein and Boxer jointly introduced a 147-page Senate bill not long after the Republican-controlled House approved a 170-page bill along largely party lines. The competing bills helped frame the subsequent negotiations.

“My House and Senate colleagues and the people of the Valley have fought long and hard to get this legislation passed out of both chambers,” Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, said Saturday.

The fighting, at times, turned personal. Last year, Feinstein angrily accused a McCarthy staffer of trying to sneak ambitious California water language onto another must-pass bill, while California’s House Republicans united in an extraordinary denunciation of the state’s two senators for alleged inaction in the face of an emergency.

After the highly public finger-pointing, though, California’s deal-making senior senator and the state’s highest-ranking House member managed to quietly return to the bargaining table.

Michael Doyle: 202-383-6153 @MichaelDoyle10



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Lawrence O'Leary · Vice President Sales at NOT RETIRED

This post election period has been great. Reid and Boxer gone. Discussions at the Federal level about providing CA Ag water. Side Question; Was the Ghost Building in Oakland there when Jerry Brown was Mayor?

Like · Reply · Dec 11, 2016 7:50pm



Dave Ramies · Owner/President at Ramies Consulting, Inc

You bet it was!! So much liability (and blood) on the City's decision to look the other way . . .

Like · Reply · 23 hrs



Kevin Malone · Central Washington University

REally? Rebranded? Criminal law is set at both the federal and state level...even if the feds change a law it doesnt necesssarily ef fect how the state defines and prosecutes criminal behavior. Also, note that the majority of states have Republican governors and are controlled by republican legislatures...did they redefine crime? Since 1980 the Presidency has been held for 20 years by Republicans and 16 by democrats. Crime is down...period.

Like · Reply · Dec 11, 2016 1:01pm



Dave Ramies · Owner/President at Ramies Consulting, Inc

You need to talk with the people who deal with crime every day . The stats have been manipulated by both sides to the point of being meaningless (same with unemployment). A person caught distributing illegal drugs gets a misdemeanor charge and a 180-day stay (they're usually out in 90 days). This used to be a felony.

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Daniel L Moyer · Florida Institute of Technology

Let the Legal Battles Begin in the Federal Courts to Confront the Rule of Law

Like · Reply · Dec 11, 2016 12:13pm



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Robert Joseph · Rubidoux High School

Jerry Brown and the liberals blocked efforts decades ago that would have alievieated many of the problems caused by the current draught. The Fed should not pay from the problems that Brown and the liberals caused. Brown should scrap his dream train and use that money instead. P .S. For all of the Californians who voted for Newsom's ammunition bill, you just cost the state a major portion of it's conservation money from the Pitman/Robertson bill.

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 11, 2016 9:52am



Mitch Vilos · J. Reuben Clark Law School

Build more dams and let the environmentalists scream.

Like · Reply · 3 · Dec 11, 2016 7:35am



Rick Apalategui

Barbara Boxer is a disgrace and example of why people hate politicians. She is also one of the reasons why hard working middle class Californians want to leave the state they were born and raised in. The Jerry Brown's, Gavin Newsome's and Barbara Boxer's reduced this proud state of the union that gave us Ronald Reagan reduced to an over-taxed, crime ridden welfare state.

Maybe someday if election laws are changed to show proof of ID to vote and incorporate term limits, we could see this state inch back to it's once former glory .

Like · Reply · 8 · Dec 11, 2016 7:21am



Mark Corbett Wilson · Senior Clerk, Mr. Alan Jeffries - Fine Gentlemen's Apparel at The Great Dickens Christmas Fair

Anyone that can read knows that "crime" has declined steadily since Reagan. Corporate crime, which no one tracks, seems to be rampant, i.e.; Great Recession, Deepwater...

Like · Reply · 1 · Dec 11, 2016 11:02am



Dave Ramies · Owner/President at Ramies Consulting, Inc

Mark Corbett Wilson Nope - Crime has been 're-branded' Mark. Talk to anyone working in law enforcement and they will tell you that they've never seen crime this rampant. How did the Dems do it? Get caught for drug trafficking - misdemeanor!!! No longer a felony . So! Yes! The rate of felonious crime has fallen. Such manipulative BS!

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 11, 2016 11:25am



Kevin Malone · Central Washington University

Dave Ramies : A misdemeanor is still a crime. Really? Rebranded? Criminal law is set at both the federal and state level...even if the feds change a law it doesn't necessarily effect how the state defines and prosecutes criminal behavior . Also, note that the majority of states have Republican governors and are controlled by republican legislatures...did they redefine crime? Since 1980 the Presidency has been held for 20 years by Republicans and 16 by democrats. Crime is down...period. You can look up all of the statistics on the FBI web site. Violent crime...which has been defined consistently is down 16.5 percent since 2006. It is up 3.9 percent in the last year ...

Like · Reply · 1 · Dec 11, 2016 1:06pm



William Willis · Works at Self employed

How can the water be for farms that have gone bankrupt? It is too late. Boxer helped see to that. At least in this article McLatchy points out the favorite tactic of the left - if there is part of the law you do not like get a leftist, partisan or activist judge to subvert the power of the legislature and not only declare it unconstitutional but then re-write it and make it law. What a Joke.

Like · Reply · 3 · Dec 11, 2016 5:20am



James Barker

What is wrong with this system that lets worthless, corrupt parasites like Barbara Boxer , Diane Feinstein and nauseum get rich and have 30+ year "careers" in politics? It's no wonder how a beautiful and productive state like California is so screwed up.

Like · Reply · 8 · Dec 11, 2016 4:54am



Dave Ramies · Owner/President at Ramies Consulting, Inc

Bingo James. I am a native and looking to leave. Tired of paying for this state's insanity through the nose.

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 11, 2016 11:26am



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Shim Shimsheroo

Hey would it be so crazy to put in a pipeline system for water? We do it for oil. This country is crisscrossed with oil pipelines. I figure the mississippi river just as one example has 1.6 million gallons per second flowing down it. If we set up some huge pumps and pipelines we could keep it pumped down during storm season so that it never overflows its banks. I'm sure the aquifers the farmers use in the midwest and the reservoirs in california and arizona etc would be glad to have the excess water and I'm sure some places that flood regularly would like to have that threat eliminated.

Like · Reply · 3 · Dec 10, 2016 11:26pm



Mike Gregory

That is a bad idea all around.

California is a desert and no amount of piping in water from other parts of the country will suffice. Look it up on a map and see exactly just how big it is. What they needed years ago and they knew this but put it off so they wouldn't have to pay for it is desalination plants.

As for places that flood regularly no amount of piping could reduce that much water. Many factors are usually at play, the area might be below sea level a storm drops 5 feet of water in an area in an hour ect ect.

What the news tends to gloss over is that a lot of those farmers are growing cash crops to be shipped overseas. Rice and other high water demand crops. It is also a lot of corporate owned mega farms, that story of the melon farmer crying in her office is just that a story.

Keep in mind that California also has a lot of bottled water plants operating in the area. Care to guess how much those plants have cut back on their usage?

Like · Reply · Dec 11, 2016 1:05am



Steven Ziebell

Problem with Mississippi water is the mud and the flying carp that need to be filtered out. Israel does fine with desal plants. Cal. can too if they build them

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 11, 2016 6:46am



La Jacks

Time for the HAG to GO.

Like · Reply · 4 · Dec 10, 2016 9:38pm



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There comes a time in every professional woman's life when she realizes she's spent half her savings on dry cleaning.



By MMT

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1 — EPA: 'Data gaps' block verdict on fracking, drinking water, WHIO, 12/13/2016

<http://www.whio.com/news/national-govt--politics/epa-data-gaps-block-verdict-fracking-drinking-water/ePlpv7ktVKKQW9ox0qEdcJ/>

Hydraulic fracturing to drill for oil and natural gas poses a risk to drinking water in some circumstances, but a lack of information precludes a definitive statement on how severe the risk is, the Environmental Protection Agency says in a new report that raises more questions than answers. The report removes a finding from a draft issued last year indicating that fracking has not caused "widespread, systemic" harm to drinking water in the United States.

2 — 4 million Americans could be drinking toxic water and would never know, USA Today, 12/13/2016

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/12/13/broken-system-means-millions-of-rural-americans-exposed-to-poisoned-or-untested-water/94071732/>

The leaders of this former oil boomtown never gave 2-year-old Adam Walton a chance to avoid the poison. It came in city water, delivered to his family's tap through pipes nearly a century old. For almost a year, the little boy bathed in lead-tainted water and ate food cooked in it. As he grew into a toddler — when he should have been learning to talk — he drank tap water containing a toxin known to ravage a child's developing brain.

3 — EPA weighs in on Dripping Springs wastewater permit, KVUE, 12/12/2016

<http://www.kvue.com/news/investigations/defenders/epa-weighs-in-on-dripping-springs-wastewater-permit/368892386>

The EPA told the state of Texas they are concerned with how the state would allow dripping springs to discharge its wastewater. They stated issues in a letter to TCEQ and asked for more information.

4 — Amendment speeds up reimbursements for mine spill, Daily Times, 12/12/2016

<http://www.daily-times.com/story/news/local/new-mexico/2016/12/12/amendment-speeds-up-reimbursements-mine-spill/95348144/>

Federal lawmakers representing New Mexico say the approval of an amendment to expedite reimbursements for expenses incurred during the Gold King Mine spill is a victory for local governments and residents.

5 — Oklahoma Lawmakers Consider Selling Power Plants To Fill Budget Hole, NPR, 12/12/2016

<https://stateimpact.npr.org/oklahoma/2016/12/12/oklahoma-lawmakers-consider-selling-power-plants-to-fill-budget-hole/>

Oil prices are on the rebound, which should eventually generate revenue and help Oklahoma's state budget situation. Still, another budget hole — that could be as large as \$600 million — will likely have to be filled during the 2017 legislative session. One emerging idea that could put an extra billion dollars in state coffers: Selling the Grand River Dam Authority.

6 — 50-foot dredging depth proposed for parts of lower Mississippi River, Times Picayune, 12/12/2016

http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2016/12/corps_backs_50-foot_depth_for.html

Portions of the Mississippi River's main ship navigation channel, including stretches between Southwest Pass and the river's mouth and between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, would be deepened to 50 feet under a plan and environmental assessment recently released by the Army Corps of Engineers. That's three to five feet deeper than present.

7 — EPA turns down \$20.4M in Gold King disaster requests, Greenwire, 12/12/2016

<http://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2016/12/12/stories/1060047049>

U.S. EPA said Friday it will pay \$4.5 million to state, local and tribal governments in relation to the 2015 Gold King mine disaster, but rejected \$20.4 million in other requests related to the spill. An EPA-led crew triggered the 3-million-gallon spill from the inactive mine in Colorado while doing cleanup work. The toxic wastewater traveled into rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.

8 — FORT STOCKTON HAS A SURPLUS OF AQUIFER WATER AND THE CITY WANTS TO SELL IT, Texas Standard, 12/9/2016

<http://www.texasstandard.org/stories/categories/energy-environment/>

Fort Stockton is partnering with local water system builders to quench the collective thirst of communities and cities across west Texas and as far as Austin. The project would tap aquifers underneath the city to sell to places that need long-term solutions to Texas' water problem. The city is partnering with veteran water businessman Alan Murphy to bring the plan to fruition.

9 — Watershed meetings underway, Ark. Democrat Gazette, 12/12/2016

<http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2016/dec/12/watershed-meetings-underway-20161212/>

About 100 people attended the first public meeting of an 18-month process to create a watershed management plan for the Buffalo River last week. Many of them — farmers, neighbors and outsiders who love the Buffalo — agreed on some of the same concerns for the river: too much gravel in the river, failing septic tanks, erosion.

10 — After years of drama, farmers score a big win in California water battle, McClathyDC, 12/10/16

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/congress/article120131428.html#storylink=cpy> ,

The California water bill now ready for the president's signature dramatically shifts 25 years of federal policy and culminates a long and fractious campaign born in the drought-stricken San Joaquin Valley.

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EPA: 'Data gaps' block verdict on fracking, drinking water

Updated: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 10:26 AM

Published: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 10:01 AM

By: Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hydraulic fracturing to drill for oil and natural gas poses a risk to drinking water in some circumstances, but a lack of information precludes a definitive statement on how severe the risk is, the Environmental Protection Agency says in a new report that raises more questions than answers.

The report removes a finding from a draft issued last year indicating that fracking has not caused "widespread, systemic" harm to drinking water in the United States. Industry groups hailed the draft EPA study as proof that fracking is safe, while environmentalists seized on the report's identification of cases where fracking-related activities polluted drinking water.

The final report takes pains to avoid drawing any conclusions.

"The report provides valuable information about potential vulnerabilities to drinking water resources, but was not designed to be a list of documented impacts," the EPA said in a statement provided to The Associated Press ahead of the report's release on Tuesday.

Fracking involves pumping huge volumes of water, sand and chemicals underground to split open rock formations so oil and gas will flow. The practice has spurred an ongoing energy boom but has raised widespread concerns that it might lead to groundwater contamination, increased air pollution and even earthquakes.

Tom Burke, EPA's science adviser and a deputy assistant administrator, said in an interview that the removal of the phrase about "widespread, systemic" impacts came at

CLOSINGS AND DELAYS: TOTT BURKE, EPA's science adviser and a deputy assistant administrator, said in an interview that the removal of the phrase about "widespread, systemic" impacts came at the urging of the EPA's Science Advisory Board.

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"Data gaps did not allow us to quantify how widespread the impacts are," Burke said.

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In light of comments by the science adviser and factors, top EPA officials "concluded that sentence (about widespread impacts) could not be supported," Burke said.

Environmental groups have claimed that the finding of no widespread harm was inserted into the draft report at the insistence of the White House. President Barack Obama generally supports fracking as part of a wide-ranging energy strategy.

A spokeswoman denied that the White House applied political pressure regarding the report's language.

Like the draft study, the final report found specific instances where poorly constructed drilling wells or improper wastewater management affected drinking water. Impacts generally occurred near drilling sites "and ranged in severity, from temporary changes in water quality to contamination that made private drinking wells unusable," the EPA statement said.

In a draft report issued in June 2015, the EPA said that the number of contamination cases was small compared to the large number of wells that are fracked nationwide.

The EPA assessment tracked water used throughout the fracking process, from acquiring the water to mixing chemicals at the well site and injecting so-called "fracking fluids" into wells, to collection of wastewater, wastewater treatment and disposal.

The report identified several vulnerabilities to drinking water resources, including fracking's effect on drought-stricken areas; inadequately cased or cemented wells resulting in below-ground migration of gases and liquids; inadequately treated wastewater discharged into drinking water resources; and spills of hydraulic fluids and wastewater.

Congress ordered the long-awaited report in 2010, as a surge in fracking fueled a nationwide boom in production of oil and natural gas. Fracking rigs have sprouted up in recent years in states from California to Pennsylvania, as energy companies take advantage of improved technology to gain access to vast stores of oil and natural gas underneath much of the continental U.S.

—

Follow Matthew Daly: <http://twitter.com/MatthewDalyWDC>

Report: President-elect Trump picks Rick Perry as his energy secretary

Updated: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 10:03 AM

CLOSINGS AND DELAYS:

Published: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 9:56 AM

By: Jonathan Tilove - Austin American-Statesman

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(/weather/closings)



NEW YORK, NY - NOVEMBER 21: Former Texas Governor Rick Perry leaves Trump Tower on November 21, 2016 in New York City. President-elect Donald Trump and his transition team are in the process of filling cabinet and other high level positions for the new administration. (Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images) (Spencer Platt)

Former Texas Gov. Rick Perry is President-elect Donald Trump's choice for secretary of energy, CBS and MSNBC reported Monday night.

The apparent choice followed Perry's meeting with the president elect in New York Monday, his second post-election meeting with Trump at Trump Tower.

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The choice of Perry for a place in the Trump Cabinet is remarkable from every vantage point.

Perry, in his second presidential campaign, was among Trump's most vociferous critics, describing Trump in July 2015 as a "cancer on conservatism" and a "barking carnival act" who was "appealing to the worst instincts in the human condition."

And it was Perry, in his first presidential campaign, who at a Republican presidential debate in November 2011, declared, "It's three agencies of government when I get

CLOSINGS AND DELAYS:

there that are gone: commerce, education, and the un ... what's the third one, there? Let's see. The third one. I can't ... Oops."

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>> **Related: Donald Trump's transition:** The latest news (/news/news/national/donald-trumps-transition-latest-news/ntCB6/)

(/weather/closings)

It was an indelibly embarrassing moment that served as a death knell for his once-promising presidential campaign, and, it turned out that the third agency he wanted to eliminate but whose name eluded him was the very department that the man who he had warned would lead the GOP the way of the Whig Party has now asked him to

lead.

Perry was the first man out of the crowded Republican field last year, and he subsequently endorsed Texas Sen. Ted Cruz for president. But, when Cruz bowed out of the race after Trump beat him in the Indiana primary in May, Perry threw himself behind Trump's candidacy with his trademark enthusiasm and made it clear he would be delighted to serve in the New Yorker's administration in whatever capacity Trump, who had suggested during the campaign that Perry should have to take an IQ test to qualify for the debates, would find useful.

Perry campaigned for Trump and, in a page from the Trump reality television playbook, he also did a brief stint on Dancing with the Stars, in which his sheer ebullience compensated for his lack of experience or skills as a dancer, making a winning impression before his early exit from the show.

Perry had also been talked about as a potential secretary of defense, of agriculture and of veterans affairs.

"Rick Perry's Texas led the nation in job creation, wind energy, natural gas and oil production and electric generation," Ray Sullivan, a former chief of staff to Perry as governor and spokesman for his first presidential campaign, said Monday night.

"Perry's balanced regulatory policies reduced toxic air pollutants in Texas, while encouraging job creation," Sullivan said.

"Overall, Rick Perry's experience reforming big government agencies, encouraging job creation, championing a diverse and reliable energy portfolio, and serving as an officer in the U.S. military are all stellar qualifications for a U.S. energy secretary."

Perry also serves on the board of Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners, a pipeline company headed by Kelcy Warren, the finance chairman of his second presidential campaign. As CEO and chairman of Energy Transfer Partners, Warren has faced criticism over the company's Dakota Access pipeline project, which has drawn opposition from environmentalists and the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in North Dakota.

The current secretary of energy is Ernest Moniz, a nuclear physicist.

Trump says he will leave his businesses Jan. 20 to focus on presidency; official announcement postponed

Updated: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 8:59 AM

CLOSINGS AND DELAYS:

Published: Monday, December 12, 2016 @ 10:11 PM

By: Kelcie Willis - Cox Media Group National Content Desk
First Baptist Church in Kettering

(/weather/closings)



A Look at Donald Trumps Most Prominent Businesses

President-elect Donald Trump is leaving his businesses in January.

Trump **tweeted Monday night** (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/808528428123254785>) that, although he is "not mandated by law to do so," he is leaving his businesses before Jan. 20 to "focus full time" on his presidency.

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"Two of my children, Don and Eric, plus executives, will manage them," Trump said (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/808529888630239232>), referring to Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump. "No new deals will be done during my term(s) in office."

(<http://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/808528428123254785>)

CLOSINGS AND DELAYS:



Donald J. Trump

@realDonaldTrump

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Even though I am not mandated by law to do so, I will be leaving my businesses before January 20th so that I can focus full time on the.....

10:26 PM - 12 Dec 2016

8,992 36,349

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Presidency. Two of my children, Don and Eric, plus executives, will manage them. No new deals will be done during my term(s) in office.

10:32 PM - 12 Dec 2016

7,301 29,328

Trump previously tweeted that he would hold a news conference (<http://www.ajc.com/news/national/trump-tweets-that-leaving-business-focus-presidency/zPnCTvQxJdSDiKcHXyAkoK/>) Thursday to discuss that he is leaving his businesses completely.

Related: Trump tweets that he's leaving business to focus on presidency(<http://www.ajc.com/news/national/trump-tweets-that-leaving-business-focus-presidency/zPnCTvQxJdSDiKcHXyAkoK/>)

"I will be holding a major news conference in New York City with my children on December 15 to discuss the fact that I will be leaving my great business in total in order to fully focus on running the country in order to MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN! While I am not mandated to do this under the law, I feel it is visually important, as President, to in no way have a conflict of interest with my various businesses. Hence, legal documents are being crafted which take me completely out of business operations. The Presidency is a far more important task!"

The transition team backpedaled on the date Monday, saying that the press conference would be rescheduled for January.

(<https://twitter.com/brianstelter/status/808452385207185408>)

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Trump press secretary Hope Hicks: "The announcement has been rescheduled for next month." via @DylanByers


5:24 PM - 12 Dec 2016

2444

Trump repeated some of that information Monday night (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/808532286664822784>), but did not mention a specific date.

"I will hold a press conference in the near future to discuss the business, Cabinet picks and all other topics of interest. Busy times!"

(<http://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/808532286664822784>)



Donald J. Trump

@realDonaldTrump

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I will hold a press conference in the near future to discuss the business, Cabinet picks and all other topics of interest. Busy times!

10:41 PM - 12 Dec 2016

8,05532,619

Neither Trump, or his surrogates, have given any specific details on how his sons Donald Jr. and Eric will operate without the president-elect at the helm, **The Washington Post** reported (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/12/12/trump-postpones-announcement-on-how-he-will-avoid-conflicts-of-interests/?utm_term=.0aa6b1eb9602).

The paper reported that the senior Trump is required to release his personal financial information in May 2018.

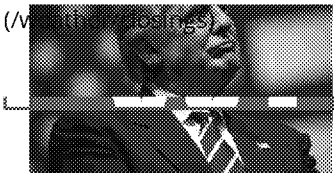
Trump's daughter, and advisor, Ivanka is expected to also step away from the business side of the family. She and her husband **were recently seen looking at homes** (<http://www.wokv.com/news/news/national/ivanka-trump-jared-kushner-planning-move-washingto/ntKBP/>) in the DC area.

Sunday, Trump had said he was going to give day-to-day control of his business empire to his three oldest children, **but The Post reported** (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/12/12/trump-postpones-announcement-on-how-he-will-avoid-conflicts-of-interests/?utm_term=.0aa6b1eb9602) that he may not fully separate himself from the company that bears his name.


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5 things to know about Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson

Updated: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 6:43 AM

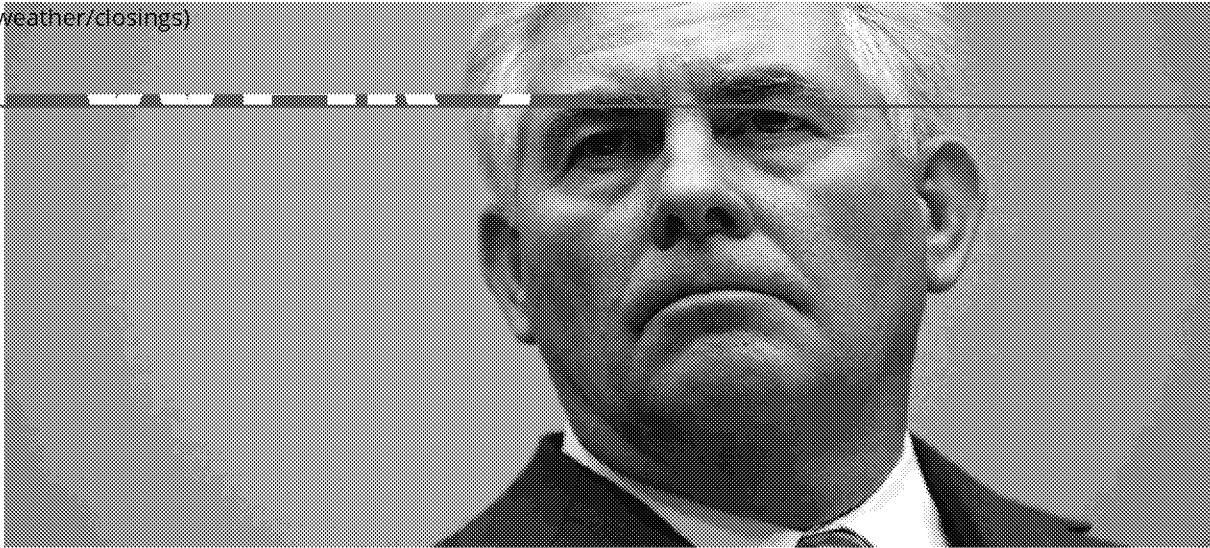
Published: Tuesday, December 13, 2016 @ 6:29 AM

By: Joy Johnston - Cox Media Group National Content Desk

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President-elect Donald Trump announced early Tuesday that Exxon Chairman and CEO Rex Tillerson will be nominated for secretary of state. The report came just days after former New York City Mayor **Rudy Giuliani removed himself from consideration** (</news/news/national/donald-trumps-transition-latest-news/ntCB6/>) for the position. Giuliani had been on Trump's shortlist of secretary of state candidates, along with former Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

>> Read more trending stories (</list/news/national/more-news-headlines/ajz4/>)

(</list/news/national/more-news-headlines/ajz4/>)**1. Who is Tillerson?**

Tillerson, 64, was born in Texas. He received a civil engineering degree from the University of Texas. Tillerson resides in Texas and is married with four children.

2. How long has Tillerson worked for Exxon?

Tillerson has spent his entire career at Exxon. He was hired as an engineer by Exxon in 1975 and rose through the ranks, becoming CEO in 2006. He earned \$27 million in 2015. Exxon has a mandatory retirement age of 65.

3. What organizations is Tillerson involved with in his business and personal life?

According to his [Exxon biography page \(http://corporate.exxonmobil.com/en/company/about-us/management/rex-w-tillerson\)](http://corporate.exxonmobil.com/en/company/about-us/management/rex-w-tillerson), Tillerson is a member of the American Petroleum Institute, the Society of Petroleum Engineers and the National Petroleum Council. He is also a member of the Business Roundtable and the Business Council, and a trustee of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, an honorary trustee of the Business Council for International Understanding, and a member of the Emergency Committee for American Trade. Tillerson was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 2013.

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Mr. Tillerson is a past national president of the Boy Scouts of America, a former United Negro College Fund director and is the vice-chairman of the Ford's Theatre Society.

4. What are Tillerson's political views?

A longtime Republican supporter, The Wall Street Journal reported that Tillerson supported Jeb Bush during the primaries, and did not donate to the Trump campaign. Tillerson's past public statements suggest that he is in favor of free trade and leery of government regulations and sanctions.

5. What are Tillerson's ties to Russia?

In 2011, Tillerson signed an agreement with Russia, worth up to \$300 billion, that allows ExxonMobil to drill in the offshore Arctic Kara Sea oil field, but the agreement hasn't taken affect due to U.S. sanctions against Russia over actions in Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin awarded Tillerson the Order of Friendship in 2013.

Trump declines daily intelligence briefings because he's 'a smart person'

Updated: Monday, December 12, 2016 @ 1:15 PM

Published: Monday, December 12, 2016 @ 1:09 PM

By: Theresa Seiger - Cox Media Group National Content Desk

CLOSINGS AND DELAYS

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President-elect Donald Trump looks on during the DeltaPlex Arena, December 9, 2016 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. President-elect Donald Trump is continuing his victory tour across the country. (Photo by Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

Since he won the race to the White House last month, Donald Trump has declined to get daily intelligence briefings because he's "a smart person," the president-elect said Sunday.

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"I get it when I need it," Trump said in an interview with Fox News' Chris Wallace (<http://www.foxnews.com/transcript/2016/12/11/exclusive-donald-trump-on-cabinet-picks-transition-process/>). "You know, I'm like, a smart person. I don't have to be told the same thing and the same words every single day for the next eight years. It could be eight years – but eight years. I don't need that."

Trump's views are in contrast with his recent predecessors, who have generally received the highly classified president's daily brief on a regular basis, **Reuters reported** (<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-briefings-idUSKBN13X2M9>). However, Trump's stance isn't unique. David Priess, a former briefer for the CIA, told Reuters that President Richard Nixon accepted the president's daily brief only in paper form, and often returned them to intelligence officials unopened.

Trump told Wallace that his generals and Vice President-elect Mike Pence are also getting briefings. Unidentified sources told Reuters that the Indiana governor is getting intelligence briefings at least six days a week.

"And I'm being briefed also," Trump said. **First Baptist Church in Kettering** But if they're going to come in and tell me the exact same thing that they told me, you know, that doesn't change, necessarily. There might be times where it might change. I mean, there will be some very fluid situations. I'll be there not every day but more than that." ([watch the video](#))

Trump's comments came as tension grows between the president-elect and the intelligence community, stemming from a recent CIA assessment that concluded with "high confidence" that Russia intervened in the election. Trump called the report "ridiculous" and said he believes that Democrats are pushing the report to soothe themselves after their defeat in November.

"I think it's just another excuse. I don't believe it," Trump said. "We had a massive landslide victory, as you know, in the Electoral College."

Trump won the Electoral College last month with 306 votes to Democratic rival Hillary Clinton's 232. However, Clinton won the popular vote by more than 2 million votes, according to The Associated Press.

"I think the Democrats are putting (the CIA assessment) out because they suffered one of the greatest defeats in the history of politics in this country," Trump said. "We ought to get back to making America great again, which is what we're going to do."

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4 million Americans could be drinking toxic water and would never know

BY LAURA UNGAR AND MARK NICHOLS

A USA TODAY NETWORK INVESTIGATION

Adam's parents didn't know about the danger until this fall.

Officials at City Hall knew long before then, according to local and state records. So did state and federal government regulators who are paid to make sure drinking water in Texas and across the nation is clean. Ranger and Texas officials were aware of a citywide lead problem for two years -- one the city still hasn't fixed and one the Waltons first learned about in a September letter to residents. The city and state even knew from recent tests, that water in the Walton family's cramped, one-bedroom rental house near the railroad tracks was carrying sky-high levels of lead.

Destiny and John Walton got their first inkling of a problem when blood tests in June detected high levels of lead in their sons' growing body. They first learned that their tap water contained lead — about 28 times the federal limit — when a USATODAY Network reporter told them in early November.

Millions of Americans face similar risks because the nation's drinking-water enforcement system doesn't make small utilities play by the same safety rules as everyone else, a USATODAY Network investigation has found.

Tiny utilities -- those serving only a few thousand people or less -- don't have to treat water to prevent lead contamination until after lead is found. Even when they skip safety tests or fail to treat water after they find lead, federal and state regulators often do not force them to comply with the law.

USATODAY Network journalists spent 2016 reviewing millions of records from the Environmental Protection Agency and all 50 states, visiting small communities across the country and interviewing more than 120 people stuck using untested or lead-tainted tap water.

The investigation found:

- About 100,000 people get their drinking water from utilities that discovered high lead but failed to treat the water to remove it. Dozens of utilities took more than a year to formulate a



Adam Walton, 2, in striped shirt, has high levels of lead in his blood. He lives with his mom, Destiny; dad, John; and brother Andrew, 1, in Ranger, Texas. The water supplying their house, background, tested high for lead.

(Photo: Laura Ungar, USA TODAY)

treatment plan and even longer to begin treatment.

- Some 4 million Americans get water from small operators who skipped required tests or did not conduct the tests properly violating a cornerstone of federal safe drinking water laws. The testing is required because, without it, utilities, regulators and people drinking the water can't know if it's safe. In more than 2,000 communities, lead tests were skipped more than once. Hundreds repeatedly failed to properly test for five or more years.
- About 850 small water utilities with a documented history of lead contamination — places where state and federal regulators are supposed to pay extra attention — have failed to properly test for lead at least once since 2010.

This two-tiered system exists in both law and practice. State and federal water-safety officials told USATODAY Network reporters that regulators are more lenient with small water systems because they lack resources, deeming some lost causes when they don't have the money, expertise or motivation to fix problems. The nation's Safe Drinking Water Act allows less-trained, often amateur people to operate tiny water systems even though the risks for people drinking the water are the same.

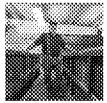
Officials in West Virginia, for example, labeled more than a dozen systems "orphans" because they didn't have owners or operators. Enforcement efforts for those utilities amounted to little more than a continuous stream of warning letters as utilities failed to test year after year. All the while, residents continued drinking untested — and potentially contaminated — water

"At the end of the day it creates two universes of people," said water expert Yanna Lambrinidou, an affiliate faculty member at Virginia Tech. "One is the universe of people who are somewhat protected from lead. ... Then we have those people served by small water systems, who are treated by the regulations as second-class citizens."

All of this endangers millions of people across the country, mostly in remote and rural communities. Utilities like East Mooringsport Water, serving part of a you town of about 800 people, where drinking water went untested for more than five years. Or Coal Mountain, W.Va., a remote 118-person outpost where a retired coal miner pours bleach into untested water at the system's wellhead in hope of keeping it clean. Or Orange Center School outside Fresno, Calif., where for more than a decade regulators let about 320 grade-school kids drink water that had tested high for lead.

Individually the communities served by small utilities seem tiny. But together, the number of people getting lead-contaminated drinking water or water not properly tested for lead, since 2010 is about 5 million.

Virginia Tech's Marc Edwards, one of the nation's top experts on lead in drinking water who helped identify the crisis in Flint, Mich., laments that people in America's forgotten places — rural outposts, post-industrial communities and poor towns — are most at risk from the dangers of lead exposure, such as irreversible brain damage, lowered IQ, behavioral problems and language delays.



USA TODAY

Beyond Flint: Excessive lead levels found in almost 2,000 water systems across all 50 states

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/03/11/nearly-2000-water-systems-fail-lead-tests/81220466/>)

Edwards said the effects of lead poisoning could make it even more difficult for families in these communities to climb out of poverty. "I'm worried about their kids," he said. "The risk of permanent harm here is horrifying. These are America's children."

The Waltons fear lead has already harmed their son. At an age when other kids use dozens of words, Adam says just three: "mama," "dada" and "no." Destiny and John wish they would have known about the lead earlier so they could have protected him.

"What's going to happen if my son's lead levels keep rising? What if the kid next door gets way sicker than my son? What's Ranger going to do then?" Destiny asked. "They've known about it for years now ... Are they going to fix it?"



Tiny Flint

WHERE EVERYTHING BREAKS DOWN AT ONCE

Perhaps the best illustration of what can happen when everything breaks down at once is Ranger, where high lead and government inaction have converged in a pervasive contamination problem experts compared to a “tiny Flint.”

Ranger’s water system dates to the city’s heyday nearly 100 years ago, when the discovery of oil attracted a population that historians say reached 30,000. Ranger is now a barren place with 2,500 people, abandoned buildings and a lonely Main Street where a mural of a steer-wrangling cowboy near an oil well fades away like the city

With ever-shrinking tax rolls and median household income at about half the national average, there’s little money to shore up a decaying infrastructure. Leaks spring daily

Many residents rely on bottled water. They’ve heard through the grapevine that the city’s water might be unhealthy. They can see for themselves it’s not always clean. While lead is colorless and odorless, algae in the water is not.

“Some days, it’s more brown than green. It smells sort of like a sewer,” said Vietnam veteran Bill Brister, who spends about \$70 a month on bottled water. “We don’t even give the dogs tap water.”

Three years ago, the city found excessive levels of copper. Nine months after that, three of 20 sites tested over the limit of 15 parts per billion of lead. Under federal law, both required immediate action, but documents show the city waited until this fall to start planning to control corrosion. Testing this September found five sites above the limit for lead, the Winton home topping the list at 418 parts per billion. The federal limit is 15.

Similar scenarios play out in hundreds of mostly struggling communities — cities built on boom-bust industries like oil and coal, isolated rural places and mobile home parks housing the poorest people in town.

Ranger is one of about 130 water systems since 2010 that failed to take timely action, and one of dozens that took a year or more to start the treatment process.

City Manager Chad Roberts said Texas environmental officials pushed hard this fall after USA TODAY Network reporters visited Ranger and began asking questions. State officials insist the push came after a weekly review found that Ranger met EPA criteria for the state to take formal enforcement action.

Ranger took its first step toward reducing lead in November — nearly three years late — by giving the state a corrosion-control study that called for adjusting the pH of the water. State officials deemed the plan insufficient, however, and are working with the city to improve it.

As the city formulates its plan, residents continue to drink water that might be dangerous.

A boil notice was in effect in early November when Kay Hodges, 23, said she drank straight from the tap because she was nine months pregnant, dehydrated and out of bottled water. "I got really sick. I was throwing up all night," she said.

Hodges lives with her fiancé and young children in a low-income housing complex called Austin Acres. A tap at the complex has repeatedly tested high for lead, most recently at more than twice the federal limit. Hodges figures she should now get checked for the toxin.

Others fear lead exposure, too. Anita Baker, a 79-year-old colon cancer survivor in Austin Acres, has been using city water for cooking and making coffee but plans to stop after learning from a reporter that boiling the water concentrates the lead.

The Waltons — who squeeze into their one-bedroom home by putting the master bed in the living room — also drank lots of city water in iced tea, Kool-Aid, diluted juice and by itself. Adam's highest blood lead reading was more than three times the federal cutoff to be considered elevated, and his 1-year-old brother Andrew, also had slightly elevated lead levels.

Texas environmental officials say they have taken steps to speed Ranger's response. They sent experts to Ranger, referred the city to the EPA for formal enforcement in March, issued new citations in October and fined the city about \$3,000.

The city raised water rates to pay for improvements and now promises to replace more of the old water lines, increase testing and seek grants for more upgrades.

"We are good with the state right now," Mayor Joe Pilgrim said, "and that's all that matters."

Still, residents may have to wait years for clean water. After the state approves a reworked corrosion-control study, Ranger has two years before it must start treating its water. By then, Adam Walton will be almost ready for kindergarten.



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Double standard

PLAYING BY A DIFFERENT SET OF RULES

It's easy to see why a place like Ranger winds up with toxic water when you compare it to a typical large water system like the one in Louisville, Ky.

Louisville Water has about 435 full-time staffers, including a director of water quality and production with a Ph.D. in environmental engineering. Ranger has seven public works employees.

Louisville Water has an operating and maintenance budget of \$127 million. Ranger's entire city budget is \$3.2 million.

The top salary for water quality employees at Louisville Water is \$141,276. Most of Ranger's public works department employees earn from \$8.50 to \$12 an hour.

Some small utilities are even worse off.

In Colorado, near Black Canyon, the man in charge of providing safe water to 335 people is a farmer who spends most of his time tending to livestock, wheat, oats and barley.

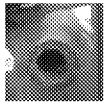
In West Texas, at Klondike Independent School District, water safety is handled by Superintendent Steve McLaren, whose first job is running a one-building school system serving 260 students. He wears many hats in the district amid cotton fields; he's been known to drive a school bus from time to time.

McLaren acknowledged he skipped required testing for lead and copper in fall 2014 because "some things just slip by." When Klondike did test last year, it found excessive lead in both rounds of testing.

Generally the bar for running tiny water systems is low. Certification for hands-on operators varies by state and typically involves passing an exam and getting ongoing continuing education credits. Some states require licensing but with varying qualifications. Minimum requirements in Texas, for instance, are a high school diploma or GED and a training course in basic water operations. No experience necessary.

"You might have to get more training to run a hot dog stand than a small water system," said Paul Schwartz with the Campaign for Lead Free Water, a group of people and organizations working to get lead out of drinking water.

Many states, and the EPA, offer extra guidance and instruction. But not everyone avails themselves of this help, leaving many small operators with "a complete lack of training," Lambrinidou said. "Sometimes, they're cheating and they don't know they're cheating."



USA TODAY

Some states, utilities balk at disclosing locations of lead water pipes

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/04/21/lead-water-service-line-location-transparency/83201228/>)

Some government funding is available for struggling utilities. EPA's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, which includes a state contribution, has provided \$32.5 billion through 2016 to water systems that applied for help. Another EPA program awards millions each year to non-profit organizations that provide training and technical assistance to small, public water systems. The U.S. Department of Agriculture also offers loans and grants.

Edwards and others say the need far outstrips the money and loans aren't helpful to utilities that can't pay them back. An EPA assessment from 2013 estimates infrastructure needs for small water systems will total \$64.5 billion over 20 years. The revolving fund's 2016 allocation, for systems of all sizes, was less than \$1 billion, and a Congressional Research Service report on the fund in November concluded that "a substantial gap remains between financing needs and available funds."

Recognizing resource constraints, the federal government lets small water systems play by more lenient rules.

Scattered throughout EPA regulations on lead and copper are specific provisions for small water systems. While utilities serving 50,000 or more people must always control corrosion, for example, smaller systems don't have to even plan for such treatment when lead is below the federal limit for two consecutive six-month periods. And they can discontinue treatment once lead drops below the limit.

Utilities serving 3,300 or fewer can, if they meet certain criteria, test for lead as little as once every nine years.

Experts say such regulations make it easy for lead problems to go undetected and uncorrected in the very places that are most vulnerable to contamination.

"You might think we have a lead in water lay Edwards said. "What we have is a national joke."



Untested water

4 MILLION LIVING WITH AN UNKNOWN

A cornerstone of those 25-year-old lead regulations is testing. But the ~~USA~~ TODAY Network found that 9,000 small water systems together serving almost 4 million people failed to test properly for lead in the past six years, meaning the toxin could be there without anyone knowing. More than a quarter of those systems had repeat lead-testing violations.

EPA acknowledges it gives higher priority to immediate public health issues like acute contamination than testing violations.

Money is a factor in skipping lead tests, which can cost around \$50 per tap. Utilities must test from five to 20 locations, depending on how many customers they serve. ~~A~~ USA TODAY Network analysis found it would cost about \$1.2 million to check the water served by every small utility that failed to test twice since 2010. Lead testing for every small water utility that missed even one test would cost around \$5 million.



USA TODAY

Lead taints drinking water in hundreds of schools, day cares across USA

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2016/03/17/drinking-water-lead-schools-day-cares/81220916/>)

Ranger admits in a letter to residents to three years of skipped or incomplete tests. Roberts, who started as city manager in the spring, blamed lack of expertise and previous neglect, saying “the ball got dropped for sure.”

It also got dropped at Orange Center School in California, which skipped testing for nine years — even after finding excessive lead in 2003. In the rural neighborhood outside Fresno, officials in charge let the kids keep drinking the water for more than a decade.

State officials threatened to fine the school, but records show no more lead tests were done until 2012 and no action was taken. Three of those tests again found high lead. Two more years went by before California officials ordered the school to stop using the water and began shipping bottled water to students, while the school waits to be connected to the much-larger Fresno water system.

Customers of East Mooringsport Water in Louisiana, are also waiting to hook up to a larger water system after at least five years of skipped tests.

“Honestly, we just didn’t have the money to do (testing),” said Edward “Pat” Turnley, who distributes monthly water bills to the 90 East Mooringsport customers. “We’re barely hanging on here.”

The state cracked down several times, ordering the district to test three years ago and fining the community more than \$43,500. But little changed. Finally in late June, the state tested nine homes itself, and found lead contamination in two. More testing will need to be done to determine the extent of the problem.



Resident Larry Free worries about the East Mooringsport Water system in Louisiana, which hadn't been tested for lead in at least five years until this summer. "I don't trust this water. I thought they were taking care of it. They haven't," he said.

(Photo: Henrietta Wildsmith, *The Times*)

East Mooringsport buys treated water from the nearby town of Blanchard, then stores it in old tanks. Resident Gladys McCauslin suspects sediment in the tanks is what makes her tap water brownish and gritty. Residents are warned to boil it before drinking or cooking.

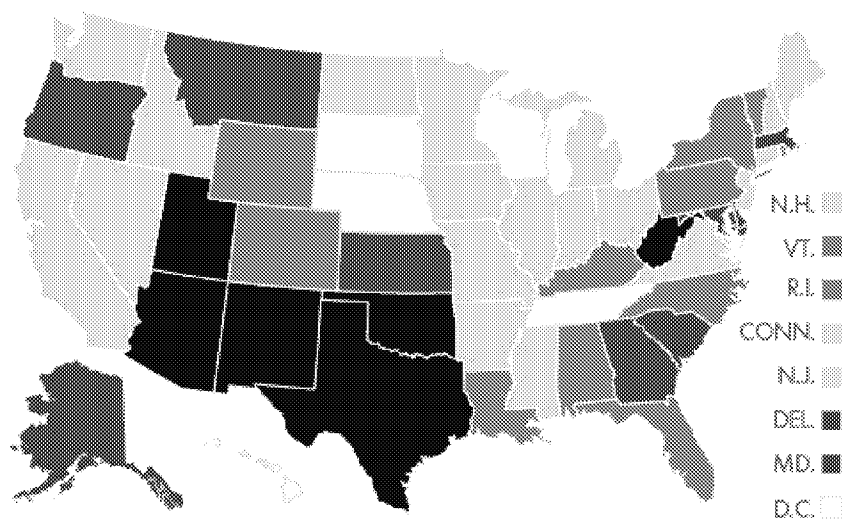
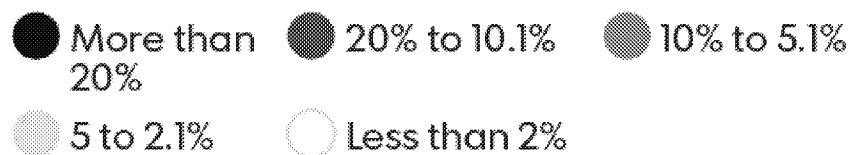
“It makes me feel like I’m in a Third World country,” said McCauslin, 75.

McCauslin hopes things will change when Blanchard, which has a new \$17 million water treatment plant, acquires her community’s water system. As she waits for the merger, she keeps doing what she’s done for years — paying the bill for untested tap water while shelling out extra money for bottled water to drink and filtered, purified water for bathing.

Residents in remote Coal Mountain, W.Va., have gone as long as anyone can remember with untested, questionable water. No one knows what contaminants it might contain.

CUSTOMERS DRAWING WATER FROM UTILITIES WITH FAILED LEAD TESTS

Percentage of each state's small water-utility customers who draw water from a system that has failed to properly test for lead since 2010:



SOURCE EPA Safe Drinking Water Information System database reports, Q3, 2016
Isabella Lucy, USA TODAY



Orphan systems

REGULATORS HAVE GIVEN UP ON SOME PLACES

Their wellhead is housed near a church, in a shed cluttered with empty bleach bottles. They've been left behind by Ravin Kenneda, a 65-year-old with a salt-and-pepper mustache and a baseball cap, who pours bleach into his community's water once in a while to keep it clean.

"It's just stuff I've learned down through the years," he said from his front-porch swing as his granddaughter sipped bottled water.

Though he's no water expert, he concedes, "Someone's got to do it."

State and federal governments have pretty much given up on enforcing safe-drinking-water rules here and in similarly tough cases, leaving residents to fend for themselves.

Coal Mountain's tap water comes from a coal company well abandoned in the 1980s. Water is pumped up the mountainside to an old storage tank hidden amid tangled trees, then flows down to homes. It's the subject of 19 water-testing violations since 1988, the most in the nation.

"We don't know what's in it," said Mila Darnell, 62, who is raising two 17-year-old grandsons with her retired coal miner husband. "I'm very concerned about lead or whatever else could be in there."

A small shed houses components of the water system for Coal Mountain in a remote corner of West Virginia.

(Photo: Jasper Colt, USA TODAY)

No doubt something is awry; the water stains the Darnells' clothes, stops up their shower head and sometimes smells like fish. Although they won't drink it, they do use it for cooking — boiling it first and hoping no one gets sick.

West Virginian officials say they can't do much beyond sending out advisories and issuing notices about water-testing violations because Coal Mountain has no owner or operator. The state labels Coal Mountain and about 15 other utilities "orphan systems."

"This happens, actually across the country. We try to work with them, but the problem is finding someone who's responsible," said Walter Ivey, director of the West Virginia health department's Office of Environmental Health Services.

One option is for states to test the water. But Jon Capacasa, director of EPA's Region 3 Water Protection Division, said that the law calls for utilities to monitor for lead and report results to states, and that the obligation lies with them.

When utilities can't or won't, however, they often face little if any real punishment.

Notices and orders were EPA's weapons against Coal Mountain's lead-testing violations for five years — after which nothing changed and West Virginia asked that no further federal action be taken.

Water-quality advocates say residents deserve better

Kailyn Brooke Taylor, 5, of Coal Mountain, W.Va., drinks bottled water because their tap water might be unsafe.

(Photo: Jasper Colt, USA TODAY)

Government "owes it to these people to at least provide clean drinking water," said Wyoming County Clerk Mike Goode, adding that the county is working on a proposal to help Coal Mountain. "It's bad. These people live in America. They have a right to good water."

But Mila Darnell laments that such rights don't always extend to poor rural Americans like her.

"We're a forgotten people," she said. "It hurts to feel ... like you just don't count."

'No responsible party'

ACCOUNTABLE OFFICIALS MINIMIZING DANGER

Roberts, the city manager, downplayed the danger from Range's water. Roberts said small children and pregnant women probably shouldn't drink it (as the city said in a letter to residents). He said overall, "I don't see a problem with drinking (it.) I drink it. ... I don't think it's a health alert serious enough for an emergency."

Roberts blamed much of the lead problem on homeowners' pipes, although he acknowledged the city's distribution system contains lead pipes as well.

Pilgrim, Range's mayor, agreed the water isn't unsafe, saying his city "has never put any of their people in danger ... It's not an ongoing medical disaster to anyone in town for any reason."

They are far from the only officials to minimize water problems.

Kentucky's Peter Goodmann, who directs the division of water there, used a similar rationale to defend many years of inaction when a tiny water system without an owner refused to test for contaminants. "There's not much we could do because there's no responsible party," Goodmann said of Kettle Island Water, which was recently downgraded from a public water system because it's gotten so small. "Nobody's dying there, and there doesn't seem to be any public health effects."

Ranger, Texas, City Manager Chad Roberts says state environmental officials pushed hard for action on the city's water problems this fall after USA TODAY Network reporters visited the town and began asking questions.

(Photo: Laura Ungar, USA TODAY)

The EPA would not allow senior officials including Peter Grevatt, director of the Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water, to be interviewed. The agency would respond only in writing to questions, saying it is revising lead regulations, working with states to strengthen protections and oversight, and remains committed to "vigorous civil and criminal enforcement to protect public health." On Nov 30, the EPA released a drinking water "action plan" that includes proposed steps to help tiny water utilities comply with the drinking water laws, such as guidance to help them find money for needed improvements and updated certification guidelines for people operating them.



USA TODAY

Here's what EPA says it's doing about lead in tap water

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(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/12/13/heres-what-epa-says-s-doing-lead-tap-water/94812122/>)

For now, lead continues to taint tap water in places like Range. Katelyn Peters, who lives next door to the Waltons, doesn't see anything changing soon.

"This is where I was raised. This is where I was planning on raising my kids," she said, watching three of her four kids chase each other in the front yard, wondering if the water could be slowly poisoning the town's kids. "Now, I'm terrified. I would live anywhere else."

Contributing: Lex Talamo of The Shreveport (La.) Times and Caitlin McGlade.

Talamo reported from Mooringsport, La. McGlade reported from Ranger, Tex.

Nichols reported from Indianapolis. Ungar reported from Range, Coal Mountain, W.Va., and Louisville.

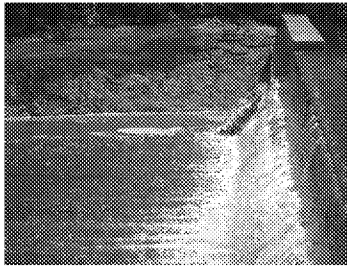


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CHAPTERS

EPA weighs in on Dripping Springs wastewater permit

Erica Proffer , KVUE 10:09 PM. CST December 12, 2016



DRIPPING SPRINGS, TEXAS - The EPA told the state of Texas they are concerned with how the state would allow dripping springs to discharge its wastewater.

They stated issues in a letter to TCEQ
(<https://www.scribd.com/document/334045141/Dripping-Springs-City-of-TX0136778-Interim-Objection-Letter-Final-2>)
and asked for more information.

"The letter is called an interim objection. It is considered EPA comments to the proposed permits, not opposition. The state reviews those comments and makes a final decision on the permit. The state must issue a final permit that meets the requirements of federal law," said David Gray, EPA Office of External Affairs Director in an email.

This is not a formal objection.

"EPA only issues a formal objection if the final permit doesn't meet federal law. In that case, the state must correct the permit to meet federal law or EPA can issue the permit," said Gray.

The discharge permit is to allow treated wastewater to be discharged into a creek which flows toward Onion Creek.

Downstream, Onion Creek contains recharge zones for our aquifers.

It's considered sensitive because the creek water goes into the aquifer with little filtration.

TCEQ wouldn't say what they'll do exactly about this letter. They told KVUE they're evaluating it.

"EPA's review and comment on certain applications is part of the regular permitting process. The TCEQ is currently evaluating the EPA objection letter and cooperatively working with EPA to address the issues included in the letter. TCEQ will address the issues in a written response to EPA. Concurrently with the response to EPA, TCEQ will be evaluating numerous written comments received during the public comment period as well as oral comments received at the public meeting held on November 10, 2016. After the issues are resolved, the TCEQ will move the application and draft permit to the next stage of the permitting process and mail out the response to comments," said TCEQ Spokeswoman Andrea Morrow in an email.

This is a typical process for issuing permits.

"When the state proposes a permit, EPA has 45 days to review and comment on water permits proposed by the state. The letter is our comments on the TPDES permit – which is a new permit to build a wastewater treatment plant," said Gray. "I understand that there has been community interest in the state's permit and future plant. The next step is for the state to review our comments and propose their final permit. I cannot speculate on that outcome."

The KVUE defenders covered this topic in-depth. Watch the full report [here](http://www.kvue.com/news/investigations/defenders/the-dirty-truth-about-texas-water/342366238) (<http://www.kvue.com/news/investigations/defenders/the-dirty-truth-about-texas-water/342366238>).

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Oklahoma Lawmakers Consider Selling Power Plants To Fill Budget Hole

DECEMBER 12, 2016 | 2:21 PM

BY LOGAN LAYDEN

Oil prices are on the rebound, which should eventually generate revenue and help Oklahoma's state budget situation. Still, another budget hole ~~that could be as large as \$600 million~~ — will likely have to be filled during the 2017 legislative session. One emerging idea that could put an extra billion dollars in state coffers: Selling the Grand River Dam Authority

eCapitol reports newly appointed House Appropriations and Budget Chair Leslie Osborn and Senate Majority Floor Leader Greg Reat intend to introduce a bill to clear a path for the sale of GRDAs assets, like its hydroelectric dams.

"This is not necessarily a bill to sell the GRDA," said Osborn, R-Mustang. But during tough budget times, we need to have a plan in place should the need arise. We have several assets that are not a core function of state government. The GRDA could be worth more than a billion dollars, and it would be imprudent for the Legislature to not consider creative ways to raise money to fund core services. This legislation does not mandate a sale; it

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LOGAN LAYDEN / STATEIMPACT OKLAHOMA

The Grand River Dam Authority's coal-fired plant in Chouteau, Okla.

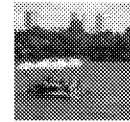
enables the state to sell the asset if it was decided it was in the best interest of the state and its citizens."

The GRDA is a state-owned, non-appropriated, non-profit utility that provides power to northeast Oklahoma from three hydroelectric power plants at Grand Lake and Lake Hudson, as well as a coal-fired power plant near Chouteau, Oklahoma.

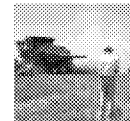
GRDA also has important water distribution monitoring duties, and a **StateImpact** reported last spring, just absorbed the responsibilities of the now-defunct Scenic Rivers Commission, which was charged with preserving and policing some of Oklahoma's most **sensitive and economically vital waterways**. It's unclear how the privatization of the agency would affect the state's six scenic rivers.

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A bill has not been filed, but there's already pushback to the idea. On Monday Rep. David Perryman, D-Chickasha, released a statement warning that the sale of the GRDA could spell economic doom for northeastern Oklahoma's economy:

The GRDA is not only an essential supplier of electricity for 24 counties in Oklahoma and in three other states, it keeps the price of power affordable in a depressed region that needs that edge for economic and community development. In addition, the GRDA manages water consumption by 700,000 people, irrigation, navigation and recreation. It invests in water quality, fish and wildlife enhancement, public safety, lake patrols, land use management and air quality improvements. It is much more than an "asset" to be sold to fill a budget gap.

The Grand River Dam Authority is working like it was designed to work and its sale has the potential of rendering devastation to the economy of northeastern Oklahoma.

Perryman points out this isn't the first time selling the GRDA has been floated as a way to generate more money for the state. In 2013, Gov. Mary Fallin formed a task force to study its sale, and failed bills in the 2015 and 2016 legislative sessions would have **authorized the sale of the agency's property and diverted some of GRDA's revenue** to the state.

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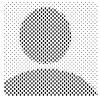
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50-foot dredging depth proposed for parts of lower Mississippi River



By [Mark Schleifstein, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune](#)

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on December 12, 2016 at 10:38 AM, updated December 12, 2016 at 8:12 PM

Portions of the **Mississippi River's main ship navigation channel**, including stretches between Southwest Pass and the river's mouth and between **New Orleans** and **Baton Rouge**, would be deepened to 50 feet under a plan and environmental assessment recently released by the Army Corps of Engineers. That's three to five feet deeper than present.

The project would allow access to the ports of **Plaquemines**, **New Orleans** and **South Louisiana** by the new, larger "**Panamax**" ocean-going vessels that were built with much more cargo capacity to take advantage of the expansion and deepening of the Panama Canal. Other U.S. ports on the Gulf, East and West coasts either already have completed similar navigation channel deepening projects or are trying to get them approved.

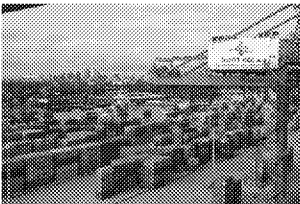


Corps to study deepening Mississippi River ship channel

The increased depth will reduce the need to load some ships with less cargo weight than their size allows, or to unload cargo from ships before they enter the river's mouth. Officials also hope that the deeper dredging will increase the intervals between required maintenance dredging.

The deepening project would have an initial construction cost of \$88.9 million, of which the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development would have to pay \$22.2 million. The state's share includes \$2.5 million to acquire land and easements, move underground pipelines or other utilities and dispose of any hazardous materials found during construction.

The corps estimates that maintaining and operating the deeper channel will cost about \$21.6 million a year, all would be paid by the federal government, and the net annual benefits to the U.S. economy at \$96.8 million. In a study recommending deepening, the corps said it would result in a national economic benefits to cost ratio of about 5.47 to 1.



What is the future of the Port of New Orleans?

The southernmost part of the project is between river mile 14 above Head of Passes near **Venice** and mile 22 below Head of Passes, at the river's mouth. The portion of the river below Head of Passes is Southwest Pass.

The navigation channel in that area would be officially deepened from the present 48 feet below its lowest low-water level -- during lowest tidal levels -- to 50 feet, but in reality it would be 54 feet in the beginning. That's because the dredging also would include 2 feet of "advanced maintenance" and 2 feet of allowed "overdepth", both aimed at increasing the time between required maintenance dredging.

The deepening project could take as long as four years to complete and produce about 18 million cubic yards of sediment. The sediment could be sent away "beneficial use" such as creating wetlands, under federal rules that require the corps to limit the amount of added cost to transport sediment away from the channel.

Wetlands could benefit

The corps expects to create 1,462 1/2 acres, or more than 2 1/4 square miles -- of new wetlands in the federal **Delta National Wildlife Refuge** and the state **Pass A Loutre Wildlife Management Area**, both on the east side of the river near Head of Passes. The corps now has access to 143,264 acres in the area for disposal of material dredged from the southern part of the river to meet the present 48-foot depth, and it expects to add 24,054 acres for the new dredging project.

The corps study cites the wetland creation program as a major benefit of the project to offset its other environmental effects.

"The creation of marsh would provide an increase in fish and wildlife habitat including nesting habitat for water fowl and nursery habitat for fish," the report said. "Consumptive recreation use would likely increase as a result of an increase in quality and quantity of fish and wildlife habitat. Bird watching opportunities are also expected to increase because of improved habitat for neo-tropical migratory songbirds."

But dredging has its downsides. The study says increased saltwater intrusion caused by the deeper channel and by relative sea level rise will likely result in a loss of more than 833 1/2 acres of the new wetlands over 50 years, based on loss rates for the area between 1932 and 2010.

"However, it is anticipated that the proposed project would not result in overall adverse direct or secondary impacts to the aquatic environment and human environment in or near the project area," the report said.

Louisiana could pay more money to move dredged sediment moved farther away, to areas identified by the state as more in need of wetland restoration. But there are no current plans to do so, said Bren Haase, head of the state Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority's coastal master plan planning team.

Congress has authorized and appropriated \$100 million for beneficial use dredging, as part of the 2004 Louisiana Coastal Area Ecosystem Restoration Study. That money could be used to extend the distance of pumping the dredged material. But state officials have refused to use that money for areas in lowermost **Plaquemines Parish** because they think the money can be better matched with other dredging elsewhere, where the material can be put to better use in protecting inland populated areas.

The corps report said some possible environmental effects of dredging, including noise, will be avoided by requiring contractors to limit operations when some endangered species such as manatees might be in the area, or by delaying dredging or other operations in the case of nearby bird rookeries.

Saltwater wedge

The lower river project must also take into account the need for the corps to build an underwater berm downriver of Plaquemines Parish water intakes during very low river periods. The berms would be designed to block salt water from entering Plaquemines' intakes and those of upriver water systems.

The wedge of salt water in the river is present throughout the year in Southwest Pass. But it moves upriver when there's not enough freshwater carried by the river to keep the wedge from moving north. The corps report says present research indicates there won't be an increase in the number of times the corps must build the underwater sill, which now averages every 10 years.

The portion of the river between mile 14 above Head of Passes and the Bonnet Carre Spillway in **St. Charles Parish** already is deeper than 50 feet, much deeper in some parts. In the Port of New Orleans, for example, the bottom of the navigation channel can be as deep as 200 feet below the normal lowest surface of the water.

However, the Port of New Orleans has requested that access ways between wharves on the river's east bank and the channel be deepened to 50 feet, to take advantage of the new depth at the mouth of the river. While that's not included in the current corps plan, language approving that proposal is included in a water projects bill under final consideration in the Senate.

Kenner-Baton Rouge dredging

The second area that is part of the corps-recommended deepening project stretches from just south of the Port of Baton Rouge to **Kenner**. This includes the Port of South Louisiana.

The project calls for deepening three "river crossings," the straight reaches of the river between river bends, with the sediment deposited in deeper water areas just downstream.

The crossings are:

- Fairview, between river miles 111 and 117 adjacent to **Luling**
- Belmont, between river miles 151 and 156 and adjacent to Oak Alley in **St. James Parish**
- Rich Bend, between river miles 155 and 160 near **Convent** in **St. James Parish**.

The corps estimates that about 616,600 cubic yards of sediment will be dredged from these three crossings over two years. Once the work is finished, the average annual maintenance within those crossings would increase by about 3.1 million cubic yards, again with the material disposed just downriver of each in deeper water.

State officials agree with the corps that this disposal method makes sense. That's because the cost of either moving the material by barge downstream or by trucks to other locations to rebuild wetlands would be cost prohibitive.

In choosing its recommended plan, the corps rejected a no-action plan, which would have kept some existing depths and increased others to 48 feet. It also rejected plans that would have included another nine river crossings north of the ones in the preferred, to let deeper-draft ships to reach the Port of Baton Rouge.

The current corps proposal would be the third change in the river's navigation channel depths since Congress in 1985 authorized the agency to deepen the channel to 55 feet between the river's mouth and Baton Rouge in 1985. The first phase completed in December 1987 deepened the river from 40 feet to 45 feet between the Gulf of Mexico and **Donaldsonville**, at river mile 181. The second phase, completed in December 1994, deepened the river from 40 feet to 45 feet between Donaldsonville and Baton Rouge.

The state transportation department, as the local sponsor, limited the corps' options for this third phase to those including the 50-foot depth. Deeper dredging was not considered by the state because it would have significantly added to the project's cost, and for other considerations. But it could be reconsidered in the future.

Public review, input

A copy of the full report, including 10 appendices, is available at the **corps' web site.**

The public has through Jan. 17 to comment on the plan by:

- Calling 504.862.2517
- Emailing MRSCdmin@usace.army.mil
- Mailing U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, CEMVN-PD, Attn: Steve Roberts, 7400 Leake Ave., New Orleans 70118.

Questions about the project may be submitted to Steve Roberts of the corps' environmental compliance branch by e-mail at steve.w.roberts@usace.army.mil or by telephone at 504.862.2517 or facsimile at 504.862.2088.

A decision by the corps' New Orleans District commander on the plan is expected by March, followed by the release of a feasibility design for the plan in September and a "director's report" by the chief of the corps. The director's report is to be submitted to Congress in March 2018.

A public hearing on the dredging plan is scheduled Wednesday (Dec. 14) 10 a.m. to noon in the corps' District Assembly Room, 7400 Leake Ave., New Orleans.

.....

CORRECTION: *An earlier version of this story included an incorrect amount of money that the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development would pay for the proposed dredging.*

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WATER POLLUTION

EPA turns down \$20.4M in Gold King disaster requests

Published: Monday , December 12, 2016

U.S. EPA said Friday it will pay \$4.5 million to state, local and tribal governments in relation to the 2015 Gold King mine disaster , but rejected \$20.4 million in other requests related to the spill.

An EPA-led crew triggered the 3-million-gallon spill from the inactive mine in Colorado while doing cleanup work. The toxic wastewater traveled into rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.

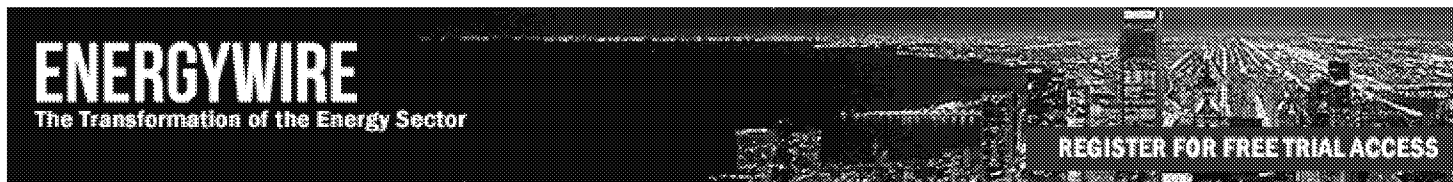
Last week, the Navajo Nation filed a separate claim for \$162 million in previous and future costs related to the spill ([Greenwire](#), Dec. 6). EPA's documents, however , listed the Navajo Nation as requesting only \$1.4 million and planned to reimburse \$603,000 of that. The difference in figures could not be immediately reconciled.

EPA's decision can be appealed. No governments indicated on Friday whether they would do so.

La Plata County in Colorado may decide this week. EPA repaid the county about \$377,000, but County Manager Joe Kerby said he thinks the agency owes it an additional \$29,000.

"It's not a huge amount, but it's actual cost that we incurred and that our taxpayers paid for because of the spill, through no fault of our own," he said (Dan Elliott, [AP/Denver Post](#), Dec. 9). — CS

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FORT STOCKTON HAS A SURPLUS OF AQUIFER WATER AND THE CITY WANTS TO SELL IT

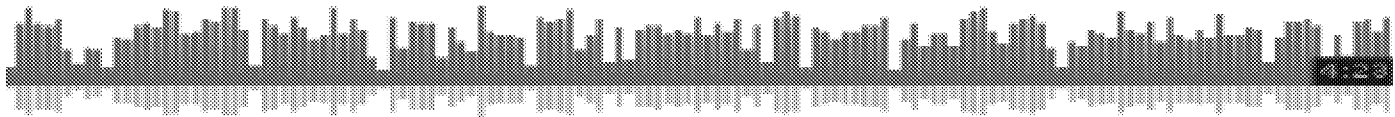
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Texas Standard

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By Rhonda Fanning & Alexandra Hart | December 12, 2016 3:18 pm

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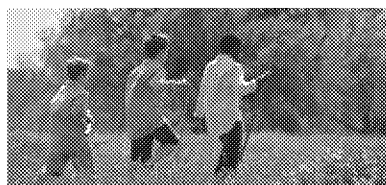
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Asher Price/Austin American-Statesman

Water system builder Alan Murphy is partnering with Fort Stockton to create a plan to sell its water.



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Fort Stockton is partnering with local water system builders to quench the collective thirst of communities and cities across west Texas and as far as Austin. The project would tap aquifers underneath the city to sell to places that need long-term solutions to Texas' water problem.

^



Agricultural property owners are now trying to export the water they've been using to grow their crops. And they've got some support.

"The city, which has resisted some efforts to export water, is now basically getting in the game," Price says. "There is a lot of potential for a lot of money. They're talking about selling it to cities as far away as San Angelo, Odessa, Midland — so some of these are hundreds of miles away. And the idea is to provide water to those cities when they need it."

The plan does not yet have an infrastructure for pumping and transporting the mass quantities of water it's proposing to sell. Price says it might be a few years before the plan takes shape — and a couple of hundreds of millions of dollars. But the city is playing the long-game.

"So you have these water developers going out, trying to find financing for a project that may or may not ever happen," Price says.

Post by Beth Cortez-Neavel.

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Watershed meetings under

By Emily Walkenhorst 
This article was published December 12, 2016 at 2:29 a.m.

MARSHALL — About 100 people attended the first public meeting of an 18-month process to create a watershed management plan for the Buffalo River last week.

Many of them — farmers, neighbors and outsiders who love the Buffalo — agreed on some of the same concerns for the river: too much gravel in the river, failing septic tanks, erosion. Many also agreed that research on the area's lagging economy should be done before a management plan is finalized, and many agreed that education and cooperation between all levels of government and locals is important.

They disagreed on other issues: whether agriculture poses a threat, and whether visitors contribute to degradation of the river. Some expressed concerns about whether the management plan would consider all the relevant players in the watershed and be fair to everyone, and whether the management plan would ever become more regulatory than voluntary.

FTN Associates, an Arkansas environmental engineering firm, held the public meeting Thursday morning at the Searcy County Civic Center gymnasium, the first of six public meetings on the proposed watershed-management plan. Hired by the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, the firm has handled watershed-management plans in other parts of Arkansas, in Mississippi and in West Virginia.

The plans always outline recommended voluntary actions for watershed management, FTN Systems Ecologist Kent Thornton told Thursday's group. None have ever become regulatory.

The purpose of a watershed-management plan is to outline conservation recommendations and make watershed landowners available for U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant funds to implement those recommendations, Thornton said.

Allen Brown, environmental program coordinator for the commission, described Thursday's meeting as a "fact-finding mission" to gauge people's concerns for the river.

"We got some pretty good responses from landowners as far as what they want to address," Brown said, adding that people had some common themes in their concerns.

But the ways issues may be addressed are myriad, Brown said, and would be a part of the discussion during the development process for the management plan.

The Buffalo River watershed spans hundreds of square miles in mostly Newton and Searcy counties. Parts of the watershed extend into Marion, Baxter, Stone, Van Buren and Pope counties.

A watershed is an area surrounding a body of water that eventually drains into the body of water. The watershed management plan would be intended for all 150 miles of the river, not just the 135 miles that are designated as the Buffalo National River by the National Park Service.

The plan will not consider facilities that have Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality permits because the commission has no authority over those, Thornton told the crowd.

Gordon Watkins, a Jasper cattle farmer and president of the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance, expressed concern that his nonpermitted cattle farm would be subject to more scrutiny than a permitted hog farm during the watershed-management plan development process.

FTN Associates will host additional meetings about every three months during the watershed-management plan development process. Thornton said he expects to hold the next meeting at the end of March.

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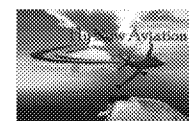
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Funds for the plan came from a \$107,000 grant from the EPA. The plan is a part of the state's larger Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee — a committee created by Gov. Asa Hutchinson that comprises five state agencies and will include public meetings and stakeholder input. That committee will meet for the first time in January, officials have said, although no date has been set.

There was little mention Thursday of C&H Hog Farms in Mount Judea — the only federally classified “large” hog farm in the watershed. The farm has drawn opposition for about the past four years because of the perceived risk it poses to the river, and that opposition has been the catalyst for research at the farm and regulation changes, including a temporary ban on medium and large hog farms in the watershed pending certain research results.

But agriculture and whether the management plan would address it were among the major concerns expressed Thursday.

Niagle Ratchford, Mike Love and Billy Ragland — all farmers — said they attended Thursday's meeting to learn more about the development process for the management plan and make sure it weighed all stakeholders' input evenly.

“I just want to see it's done fairly,” said Ragland, a cattle and hay farmer just north of Marshall.

Love, a hay farmer, said he was concerned about any possible government control of land that wouldn't benefit the environment. He said he didn't want to see regulations turn the area back into forestland, arguing that farming and timber were both major industries to the area.

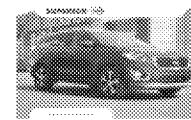
Twin brothers Larry and Garry Lilley, who live outside of the watershed but are frequent visitors to the Buffalo River, noted the great economic impact of both tourism and trout fishing in the watershed and said their top concern was seeing C&H shut down.

Sara Thorne, a member of the White River chapter of Trout Unlimited, said she's concerned for Buffalo River tourism, which she described as a major industry in the watershed.

Thorne said Thursday's meeting was informative and helped familiarize people with the development process for a watershed management plan.

Thorne said she hopes the process will consider groups in the watershed that would be willing to help implement it and the pollution risk posed by animal farms and associated fertilizer runoff. She's also concerned about erosion and wants to see more measures taken to prevent it.

“You've got to get involved in taking care of this stuff,” she said.



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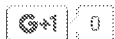
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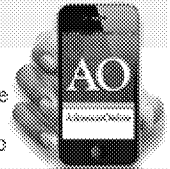
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After years of drama, farmers score a big win in California water battle



Boxer filibusters a bill rider she calls 'awful' 3:34



1 of 2



BY MICHAEL DOYLE

mdoyle@mcclatchydc.com



WASHINGTON — The California water bill now ready for the president's signature dramatically shifts 25 years of federal policy and culminates a long and fractious campaign born in the drought-stricken San Joaquin Valley.

A rough five years in the making, the \$558 million bill approved by the Senate early Saturday morning steers more water to farmers, eases dam construction, and funds desalination and recycling projects. Its rocky road to the White House also proved a costly master class in political persistence and adroit maneuvering.

“I believe these provisions are both necessary, and will help our state,” said Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

Feinstein and House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield, and their staffs, crafted the final water package, which the Senate approved on a 78-21 vote. They also made the hard-ball tactical choice to fold it into a widely popular infrastructure bill, which eased Senate passage while it left retiring Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer fuming.

“I think it is absolutely a horrible process, a horrible rider,” Boxer said during floor debate Friday. “It’s going to result in pain and suffering among our fishing families.”

Boxer cited, in particular, California’s salmon industry, whose members fear the diversion of water will deplete rivers critical to salmon reproduction.

Boxer’s post-midnight vote against the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, which included the approximately 98-page California bill, was likely to be the last of her 33-year congressional career. It was a sour ending for her long-time Senate partnership with Feinstein, with whom she’s amicably served since 1993.

Though ultimately futile, Boxer’s stand against the California water bill also foreshadows some of the big challenges ahead once the legislation takes effect. These include healing the rifts that have pit one region of the state against the other, managing the new Trump administration’s implementation of the law and coping with the inevitable litigation.

“It’s ugly, and it’s wrong, and it’s going to be a disaster,” Boxer said. ***This site is restricted to conserve EPA network resources for business activities.***

This year’s final California water package includes many elements, some of which are not especially controversial.

CALIFORNIA IS NOW ENTERING INTO OUR SIXTH YEAR OF DROUGHT. . . AND THE EFFECTS OF THE DROUGHT HAVE BEEN DEVASTATING.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.

Non-native predatory fish in the Stanislaus River will be test-targeted for elimination. Money will support water recycling projects in cities such as Sacramento and San Luis Obispo, and to desalination projects like ones proposed for Southern California.

More controversially, the bill streamlines potential construction approval of Western water projects that could include Temperance Flat on the San Joaquin River and Sites Reservoir in the Sacramento Valley. The bill's funding includes \$335 million for the water storage projects, which is only a fraction of their total cost.

With highly technical but important language, the bill also directs the pumping of more water to farms south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and seeks to ensure that Sacramento Valley farmers receive all of their allocated water.

"This water is for the tens of thousands of small farms that have gone bankrupt, like a melon farmer who sat in my office with tears in his eyes," Feinstein said.

Boxer, echoing environmentalists, countered that the real beneficiary will be "big agribusiness."

All sides agree the California water package marks the biggest federal shift in the state's water use since the 1992 Central Valley Project Improvement Act, which focused more on protecting the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Farmers hated the CVPIA but, in a mirror image of this year's water bill, it was included in a bigger package that rolled right over one of the state's protesting senators.

The Republican senator who was left standing alone in fighting the 1992 bill, John Seymour, was subsequently defeated by Feinstein. One of the other big losers in that earlier legislative fight, the Westlands Water District, is among the victors in this year's bill, after spending more than \$1 million on lobbying in the last two years.

 **IT'S GOING TO RESULT IN PAIN AND SUFFERING AMONG OUR FISHING FAMILIES.**
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Other California water districts, farmer organizations and environmental groups poured resources into trying to shape the final bill. Feinstein stressed that she went through "dozens of versions" and consulted extensively with both the Obama administration and state officials to craft the legislation.

House Republicans, in turn, kept the pressure on by repeatedly passing more aggressive California water bills. These competing measures, led first in 2011 by Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Tulare, and then by Rep. David Valadao, R-Hanford, kept presenting Feinstein with an issue that would not go away.

Last year, for instance, Feinstein and Boxer jointly introduced a 147-page Senate bill not long after the Republican-controlled House approved a 170-page bill along largely party lines. The competing bills helped frame the subsequent negotiations.

“My House and Senate colleagues and the people of the Valley have fought long and hard to get this legislation passed out of both chambers,” Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, said Saturday.

The fighting, at times, turned personal. Last year, Feinstein angrily accused a McCarthy staffer of trying to sneak ambitious California water language onto another must-pass bill, while California’s House Republicans united in an extraordinary denunciation of the state’s two senators for alleged inaction in the face of an emergency.

After the highly public finger-pointing, though, California’s deal-making senior senator and the state’s highest-ranking House member managed to quietly return to the bargaining table.

Michael Doyle: 202-383-6153 @MichaelDoyle10



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Lawrence O'Leary · Vice President Sales at NOT RETIRED

This post election period has been great. Reid and Boxer gone. Discussions at the Federal level about providing CA Ag water. Side Question; Was the Ghost Building in Oakland there when Jerry Brown was Mayor?

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Dave Ramies · Owner/President at Ramies Consulting, Inc

You bet it was!! So much liability (and blood) on the City's decision to look the other way . . .

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REally? Rebranded? Criminal law is set at both the federal and state level...even if the feds change a law it doesnt necesssarily ef fect how the state defines and prosecutes criminal behavior. Also, note that the majority of states have Republican governors and are controlled by republican legislatures...did they redefine crime? Since 1980 the Presidency has been held for 20 years by Republicans and 16 by democrats. Crime is down...period.

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Dave Ramies · Owner/President at Ramies Consulting, Inc

You need to talk with the people who deal with crime every day . The stats have been manipulated by both sides to the point of being meaningless (same with unemployment). A person caught distributing illegal drugs gets a misdemeanor charge and a 180-day stay (they're usually out in 90 days). This used to be a felony.

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Let the Legal Battles Begin in the Federal Courts to Confront the Rule of Law

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Robert Joseph · Rubidoux High School

Jerry Brown and the liberals blocked efforts decades ago that would have alievieated many of the problems caused by the current draught. The Fed should not pay from the problems that Brown and the liberals caused. Brown should scrap his dream train and use that money instead. P .S. For all of the Californians who voted for Newsom's ammunition bill, you just cost the state a major portion of it's conservation money from the Pitman/Robertson bill.

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 11, 2016 9:52am



Mitch Vilos · J. Reuben Clark Law School

Build more dams and let the environmentalists scream.

Like · Reply · 3 · Dec 11, 2016 7:35am



Rick Apalategui

Barbara Boxer is a disgrace and example of why people hate politicians. She is also one of the reasons why hard working middle class Californians want to leave the state they were born and raised in. The Jerry Brown's, Gavin Newsome's and Barbara Boxer's reduced this proud state of the union that gave us Ronald Reagan reduced to an over-taxed, crime ridden welfare state.

Maybe someday if election laws are changed to show proof of ID to vote and incorporate term limits, we could see this state inch back to it's once former glory .

Like · Reply · 8 · Dec 11, 2016 7:21am



Mark Corbett Wilson · Senior Clerk, Mr. Alan Jeffries - Fine Gentlemen's Apparel at The Great Dickens Christmas Fair

Anyone that can read knows that "crime" has declined steadily since Reagan. Corporate crime, which no one tracks, seems to be rampant, i.e.; Great Recession, Deepwater...

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Dave Ramies · Owner/President at Ramies Consulting, Inc

Mark Corbett Wilson Nope - Crime has been 're-branded' Mark. Talk to anyone working in law enforcement and they will tell you that they've never seen crime this rampant. How did the Dems do it? Get caught for drug trafficking - misdemeanor!!! No longer a felony . So! Yes! The rate of felonious crime has fallen. Such manipulative BS!

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 11, 2016 11:25am



Kevin Malone · Central Washington University

Dave Ramies : A misdemeanor is still a crime. Really? Rebranded? Criminal law is set at both the federal and state level...even if the feds change a law it doesn't necessarily effect how the state defines and prosecutes criminal behavior . Also, note that the majority of states have Republican governors and are controlled by republican legislatures...did they redefine crime? Since 1980 the Presidency has been held for 20 years by Republicans and 16 by democrats. Crime is down...period. You can look up all of the statistics on the FBI web site. Violent crime...which has been defined consistently is down 16.5 percent since 2006. It is up 3.9 percent in the last year ...

Like · Reply · 1 · Dec 11, 2016 1:06pm



William Willis · Works at Self employed

How can the water be for farms that have gone bankrupt? It is too late. Boxer helped see to that. At least in this article McLatchy points out the favorite tactic of the left - if there is part of the law you do not like get a leftist, partisan or activist judge to subvert the power of the legislature and not only declare it unconstitutional but then re-write it and make it law. What a Joke.

Like · Reply · 3 · Dec 11, 2016 5:20am



James Barker

What is wrong with this system that lets worthless, corrupt parasites like Barbara Boxer , Diane Feinstein and nauseum get rich and have 30+ year "careers" in politics? It's no wonder how a beautiful and productive state like California is so screwed up.

Like · Reply · 8 · Dec 11, 2016 4:54am



Dave Ramies · Owner/President at Ramies Consulting, Inc

Bingo James. I am a native and looking to leave. Tired of paying for this state's insanity through the nose.

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 11, 2016 11:26am



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Shim Shimsheroo

Hey would it be so crazy to put in a pipeline system for water? We do it for oil. This country is crisscrossed with oil pipelines. I figure the mississippi river just as one example has 1.6 million gallons per second flowing down it. If we set up some huge pumps and pipelines we could keep it pumped down during storm season so that it never overflows its banks. I'm sure the aquifers the farmers use in the midwest and the reservoirs in california and arizona etc would be glad to have the excess water and I'm sure some places that flood regularly would like to have that threat eliminated.

Like · Reply · 3 · Dec 10, 2016 11:26pm



Mike Gregory

That is a bad idea all around.

California is a desert and no amount of piping in water from other parts of the country will suffice. Look it up on a map and see exactly just how big it is. What they needed years ago and they knew this but put it off so they wouldn't have to pay for it is desalination plants.

As for places that flood regularly no amount of piping could reduce that much water. Many factors are usually at play, the area might be below sea level a storm drops 5 feet of water in an area in an hour ect ect.

What the news tends to gloss over is that a lot of those farmers are growing cash crops to be shipped overseas. Rice and other high water demand crops. It is also a lot of corporate owned mega farms, that story of the melon farmer crying in her office is just that a story.

Keep in mind that California also has a lot of bottled water plants operating in the area. Care to guess how much those plants have cut back on their usage?

Like · Reply · Dec 11, 2016 1:05am



Steven Ziebell

Problem with Mississippi water is the mud and the flying carp that need to be filtered out. Israel does fine with desal plants. Cal. can too if they build them

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 11, 2016 6:46am



La Jacks

Time for the HAG to GO.

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1 — EPA: Fracking can harm drinking water, Texas Tribune, 12/13/2016

<https://www.texastribune.org/2016/12/13/epa-fracking-can-harm-drinking-water/>

In an amped-up final report, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says there is scientific evidence that hydraulic fracturing activities can impact the nation's drinking water resources under some circumstances.

2 — EPA formalizes Texas nonattainment as foes prep lawsuits, EE News, 12/13/2016

<http://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2016/12/13/stories/1060047123>

U.S. EPA today formally declared that three areas of East Texas are failing to meet a key air quality standard, opening the door for opponents to challenge that decision in court.

3 — St. Tammany Parish gets \$300,000 grant for Abita River watershed, Times Picayune, 12/9/2016

http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2016/12/st-tammany-gets-300k-grant-for.html#incart_river_index

St. Tammany Parish government has received a \$300,000 grant to help improve water quality in the Abita River watershed, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Monday (Dec. 12).

4 — Enable to supply natural gas for OG&E's converted coal units, Tulsa World, 12/14/2016

http://www.tulsaworld.com/business/energy/enable-to-supply-natural-gas-for-og-e-s-converted/article_a12096f9-36d1-5269-969e-441d8758e42a.html

Enable Midstream Partners LP will supply natural gas to two converted coal units at Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co.'s Muskogee generating plant, Enable announced Tuesday. Enable, which is part-owned by OG&E's parent company, said it will supply 228,000 dekatherms per day on the Enable Oklahoma Intrastate Transmission system under a 20-year contract.

5 — Galveston Bay oyster dispute moves to federal court, Houston Chron, 12/13/2016

<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/neighborhood/bayarea/business/article/Galveston-Bay-oyster-dispute-moves-to-federal-10791977.php>

Oyster-fishing businesses have brought their battle with a Galveston Bay navigation district to federal court, alleging that the governmental body violated their constitutional rights by issuing a 23,000-acre oyster-bed lease to a single fishing company.

6 — More vigorous LNG market would benefit Oklahoma, Oklahoman, 12/14/2016

<http://newsok.com/more-vigorous-lng-market-would-benefit-oklahoma/article/5530744>

Given that North American producers aren't the only source for LNG, easing bureaucratic restrictions on export terminals is essential to maintain a competitive environment for producers and the thousands of employees who work for them.

7 — East Mooringsport customer: 'I don't trust this water, Times Picayune, 12/13/2016

<http://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/2016/12/13/east-mooringsport-customer-dont-trust-water/85260338/>

Customers of East Mooringsport water system are concerned with what's coming out of their taps. Rachel Hudson, who has lived in the surrounding neighborhood since 1978, said the water quality in the area is so horrible she wouldn't even let her cats drink it.

8 — Louisiana may use private money to fix wetlands, coast under new federal law, Times Picayune, 12/13/2016
[http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2016/12/louisiana may use private mone.html#incart most shared-environment](http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2016/12/louisiana%20may%20use%20private%20mone.html#incart%20most%20shared-environment)

While much of the to-do about the latest major water bill to pass Congress focused on lead-tainted drinking water in Flint, Michigan, and the drought in California, tucked among its provisions are details that could signal a major shift in how environmental restoration projects are financed in Louisiana.




EPA: Fracking can harm drinking water

In an amped-up final report, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says there is scientific evidence that hydraulic fracturing activities can impact the nation's drinking water resources under some circumstances.



BY KIAH COLLIER DEC. 13, 2016 3:33 PM



Vantage Energy on June 1, 2015 resumed hydraulic operations on a pad site on the western outskirts of Denton. It was the first company to frack within city limits after the Texas Legislature overturned the Denton's ban on the process.  Cooper Neill

The controversial oil and gas extraction technique known as hydraulic fracturing can contaminate drinking water under certain circumstances, according to a long-anticipated U.S. Environmental Protection Agency report released Tuesday.

Ordered by Congress in 2010, the report reaches a somewhat stronger conclusion than a draft version unveiled last year that said the agency had found no evidence that fracking has “widespread, systemic impacts” on the nation’s drinking water supplies even though the practice has harmed water in some cases.

That finding was omitted from the final report — a substantial change that environmental groups pounced on Tuesday, and industry groups and regulators dismissed. (Thomas Burke, the EPA’s science adviser and deputy assistant administrator of the agency’s Office of Research and Development told the Associated Press the removal came at the urging of the EPA’s Science Advisory Board).

But other than the removal of that one particular finding, “nothing much has changed, and there’s not a lot of new information we weren’t already aware of,” said Christi Craddick, chairman of the Texas Railroad Commission, which regulates oil and gas activity in the state.

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The commission had been looking at ways to tighten regulation of fracking before the report came out, Craddick said, but she added that the current rules are sufficient and have been strengthened multiple times already.

“As long as companies and operators follow our rules, we think we won’t see any problems with hydraulic fracturing,” she said.

Fracking involves pumping millions of gallons of chemical-laced water deep into the ground to blast apart rock holding oil and gas deposits. The technique has helped spur a domestic energy boom this century but also has been linked to earthquakes, air pollution and groundwater contamination.

The EPA misled the public about the pollution risks associated with fracking in its initial report, said Mark Brownstein, vice president of climate and energy at the Environmental Defense Fund.

"The revised assessment puts an end to the false narrative of risk-free fracking that has been widely promoted by industry," he said in a statement. "It opens the door for policy improvements and scientific advancements that could better protect the people and places most impacted."

Whether such policies will come under a Donald Trump administration would appear doubtful, at least at the federal level. The president-elect has promised to unwind oil and gas drilling regulations and is filling his Cabinet with fossil fuel industry officials and champions, including Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson and former Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who serves on the board of Dallas-based pipeline company Energy Transfer Partners.

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Burke described Tuesday's study as "the most complete compilation to date of national scientific data on the relationship of drinking water resources and hydraulic fracturing."

"EPA's assessment provides the scientific foundation for local decision makers, industry, and communities that are looking to protect public health and drinking water resources and make more informed decisions about hydraulic fracturing activities," he said in a statement.

According to the report, drinking water can be contaminated at any stage of the fracking process.


Still, the EPA says on its website that "data gaps and uncertainties limited EPA's ability to fully assess the potential impacts on drinking water resources locally and nationally."

"Because of these data gaps and uncertainties, it was not possible to fully characterize the severity of impacts, nor was it possible to calculate or estimate the national frequency of impacts on drinking water resources from activities in the hydraulic fracturing water cycle."

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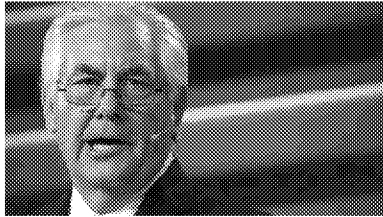
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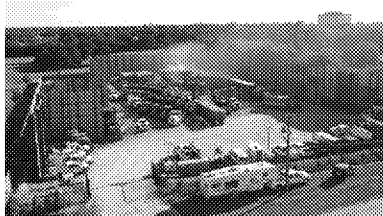
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AIR POLLUTION

EPA formalizes Texas nonattainment as foes prep lawsuits

Sean Reilly, E&E News reporter

Published: Tuesday, December 13, 2016

U.S. EPA today formally declared that three areas of East Texas are failing to meet a key air quality standard, opening the door for opponents to challenge that decision in court.

Administrator Gina McCarthy signed the nonattainment designations for the one-hour sulfur dioxide benchmark late last month. With [publication](#) in today's edition of the *Federal Register*, they take effect Jan. 12.

Texas regulators will then have 18 months to devise plans for bringing the areas into compliance, launching what could be a yearslong effort to meet the threshold of 75 parts per billion.

All three nonattainment areas surround coal-fired power plants that EPA had identified as the primary local sources of sulfur dioxide emissions.

The plants' owner, Luminant Generation Co. LLC, has already acknowledged it is considering a lawsuit, arguing that the designations were based on modeling, not actual emissions monitoring. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality had recommended listing the areas as "unclassifiable/attainment" ([Greenwire](#), Dec. 1).

Luminant, the state's largest power producer, is a branch of Vistra Energy. Under the Clean Air Act, the company has 60 days to ask the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to review EPA's decision.

EPA is already seeking to require new or upgraded pollution controls at the three plants via regulations imposed under its program to curb pollution that contributes to hazy conditions at national parks.

While the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals has stayed implementation of cleanup regulations under one part of the regional haze program, EPA is also pursuing stricter pollution controls under another provision, according to a proposed rule released Friday ([Greenwire](#), Dec. 12).

The nonattainment designations published today cover Titus County, parts of Freestone and Anderson counties, and parts of Rusk and Panola counties.

EPA officials listed a fourth area, Milam County, as unclassifiable on the grounds that they lacked the information needed to make a firm attainment determination.

EPA set the one-hour primary SO₂ standard in 2010, citing the need to protect public health. Sulfur dioxide, linked to an array of respiratory ailments, is mainly produced by burning coal.

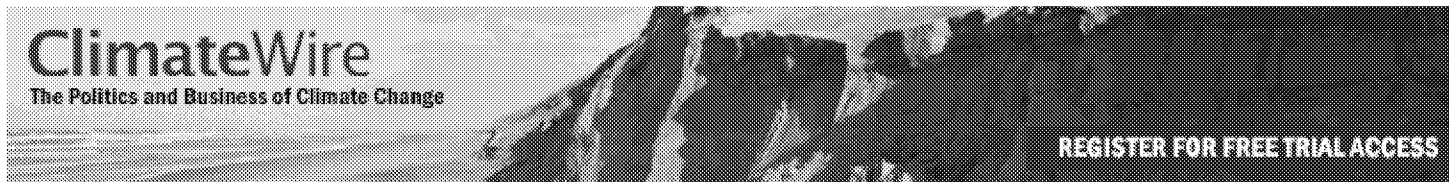
All four of the Texas designations were supposed to have been released by early July , along with dozens of others required under a consent decree to a Sierra Club lawsuit.

But attorneys for the environmental group had agreed to a small number of extensions, with EPA now set to render an attainment decision on one last area — Muskogee County in east Oklahoma — by Dec. 29.

Under the consent decree, the agency must then make two more rounds of compliance designations for other parts of the country next year and in 2020.

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St. Tammany Parish gets \$300,000 grant for Abita River watershed



The Abita River. (*NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune archive*)



By **Robert Rhoden, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune**

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on December 13, 2016 at 10:43 AM, updated December 13, 2016 at 2:37 PM

St. Tammany Parish government has received a \$300,000 grant to help improve water quality in the Abita River watershed, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Monday (Dec. 12). The parish government, in partnership with the **Lake Pontchartrain** Basin Foundation, will inspect individual sewage treatment systems and use this data and figures from other sources to determine the best course of action to restore water quality in areas where it is currently deficient, the EPA said.

The EPA said the parish government has improved wastewater treatment in recent years by consolidating services into regional wastewater treatment plants. In areas where these systems are not yet feasible, the parish, in partnership with the lake foundation, will use the grant money to implement interim solutions for wastewater treatment and help restore water quality in the Abita River watershed, the federal agency said.

The partnership with the foundation will give the parish more resources and expertise, Parish President Pat Brister said. "This water quality initiative will have far-reaching positive impacts on public health and water resources that are able to be built upon as we move into the future. This will improve our quality of life, not only now, but into the foreseeable future."

"Understanding environmental stressors is fundamental to protecting these critical resources that are so heavily relied on by the community," said Ben Scaggs, director of EPA's Gulf of Mexico Program.

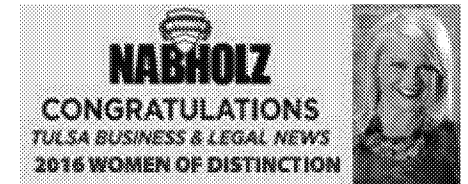
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Enable to supply natural gas for OG&E's converted coal units

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Posted: Wednesday, December 14, 2016 12:00 am

By The Oklahoman | 0 comments

OKLAHOMA CITY — Enable Midstream Partners LP will supply natural gas to two converted coal units at Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co.'s Muskogee generating plant, Enable announced Tuesday.

Enable, which is part-owned by OG&E's parent company, said it will supply 228,000 dekatherms per day on the Enable Oklahoma Intrastate Transmission system under a 20-year contract. The company will build 77 miles of 20-inch pipeline and metering facilities to the Muskogee plant. The contract is expected to start in 2018.

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“This new agreement demonstrates the strength of our integrated pipeline and storage system that can respond quickly to the fuel needs of electric utility customers,” said Rod Sailor, Enable’s president and CEO, in a statement. “It also increases our significant firm, fee-based business with high-quality customers.”

Under federal environmental rules, OG&E will convert two of its three Muskogee coal units to natural gas. The utility expects to spend \$70 million in the next three years to convert two, 500-megawatt coal units to natural gas.

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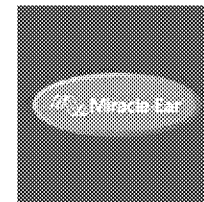
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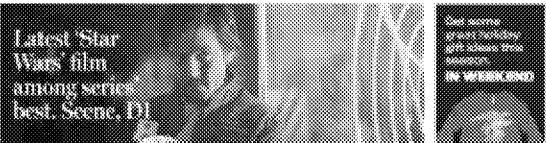
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TULSA WORLD

Former Texas Gov. Rick Perry picked for energy secretary. A3

Court nullifies abortion law

State Supreme Court
Law nullifying hospital admitting privileges for abortion doctors tossed

By [Name] [Email]
TULSA, Okla., (AP) — The Oklahoma Supreme Court on Monday ruled 5-4 to nullify a law that required doctors who do abortions to have admitting privileges at the hospital where they perform the procedure.

The court said the law was unconstitutional because it violated the constitutional right to privacy. The court also said the law was an undue burden on the right to abortion.

The court's decision is a major victory for abortion rights advocates. It is the first time a state supreme court has ruled against a law that restricts abortion.

Mayor Bynum fills board openings

Former Mayor Bynum is one of 12 nominated for boards and commissions

By [Name] [Email]
TULSA, Okla. (AP) —

Mayor Bynum, who served as Tulsa's mayor from 1995 to 2001, is one of 12 people nominated for various city boards and commissions. The nominations were made by the city council.

The nominees include Bynum, who is being nominated for the Tulsa Housing Authority board. Other nominees include [Name] for the Tulsa Public Schools board and [Name] for the Tulsa Police Department board.

By [Name] [Email]

2008 • Martin volunteers wrap gifts for needy seniors



Volunteers at the Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Tulsa are wrapping gifts for needy seniors. The gifts will be delivered to the seniors in the coming weeks.

Filling seniors' stockings



A volunteer is filling stockings with gifts for needy seniors. The gifts will be delivered to the seniors in the coming weeks.

The stockings are being filled with gifts from the community. The gifts will be delivered to the seniors in the coming weeks.

By [Name] [Email]

BA leaders show schools support

Boarding paraprofessionals' Association stressed

By [Name] [Email]
TULSA, Okla. (AP) —

Leaders of the Boarding Paraprofessionals' Association are showing their support for the local schools. They are donating supplies and materials to the schools.

By [Name] [Email]

2008 Q4 104,000

Number of new jobs added

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

2008 Q4 104,000

2008 Q3 103,000

2008 Q2 102,000

2008 Q1 101,000

2007 Q4 100,000

2007 Q3 99,000

2007 Q2 98,000

2007 Q1 97,000

2006 Q4 96,000

2006 Q3 95,000

2006 Q2 94,000

2006 Q1 93,000

2005 Q4 92,000

2005 Q3 91,000

2005 Q2 90,000

2005 Q1 89,000

2004 Q4 88,000

2004 Q3 87,000

2004 Q2 86,000

2004 Q1 85,000

2003 Q4 84,000

2003 Q3 83,000

2003 Q2 82,000

2003 Q1 81,000

2002 Q4 80,000

2002 Q3 79,000

2002 Q2 78,000

2002 Q1 77,000

2001 Q4 76,000

2001 Q3 75,000

2001 Q2 74,000

2001 Q1 73,000

2000 Q4 72,000

2000 Q3 71,000

2000 Q2 70,000

2000 Q1 69,000

1999 Q4 68,000

1999 Q3 67,000

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1998 Q3 63,000

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Galveston Bay oyster dispute moves to federal court

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By Gabrielle Banks | December 12, 2016 | Updated: December 13, 2016 11:32pm



Photo: James Nielsen, Houston Chronicle

Captain Shpend Berisha opens an oyster during an interview on Prestige Oysters boat the Hustler in Galveston Bay Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2015, in Dickinson.

Oyster-fishing businesses have brought their battle with a Galveston Bay navigation district to federal court, alleging that the governmental body violated their constitutional rights by issuing a 23,000-acre oysterbed lease to a single fishing company

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Gabrielle Banks

Reporter, Houston Chronicle

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More vigorous LNG market would benefit Oklahoma



by The Oklahoman Editorial Board • Published: December 14, 2016 12:00 AM CDT

JUST in time for a more fossil fuel-friendly presidential administration, the international market for liquefied natural gas (LNG) faces smoother sailing. At least we hope it does.

Actually, it's already underway — despite the hostility the oil, gas and coal industries have faced during the past eight years. A more vigorous LNG market is good news for gas-producing states such as Oklahoma.

LNG is natural gas that's been processed by cooling it to 260 degrees below zero (on the Fahrenheit scale). The process essentially turns a gas into a liquid, which is stored during transport across the oceans. This conversion method squeezes the volume of gas by 600 times.

Once delivered, LNG is warmed and returns to its original gaseous state. Pipelines can then distribute North American natural gas to customers in faraway nations. In a sense, the process is the reverse of the typical 20th-century model for oil: Crude gathered in, say, Saudi Arabia was transported on tanker ships to North America. This benefits the supplier, but not necessarily producing regions on this continent.

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necessarily producing regions on this continent.

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Given that North American producers aren't the only source for LNG, easing bureaucratic restrictions on export terminals is essential to maintain a competitive environment for producers and the thousands of employees who work for them.

The U.S. Department of Energy must approve applications to export LNG from a particular terminal to a particular place. The Center for Liquefied Natural Gas and other industry groups are pushing legislation to expedite approval of permits involving exports to countries that don't have free-trade agreements with the United States.

Japan is the world's largest LNG importer, accounting for more than a third of global demand. Japan, South Korea and China combined imported more than half of all exported LNG in 2015. Japan gets pretty much all of its gas from LNG, but Japan's population is in decline. Market analysts say demand will fall accordingly.

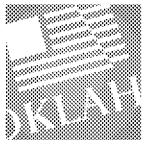
Other markets must take up the slack. And that's where the above-referenced energy bill is relevant.

President-elect Donald Trump is friendly to fossil fuels, but not so friendly to foreign nations whose trade arrangements with the U.S. put this country at what Trump sees as a disadvantage. We're not sure what stance he might take on easing export restrictions to non-free-trade countries.

In an October report, industry analyst Oilprice.com cited a forecast by the Energy Information Agency that the United States will become a natural gas net exporter in the second quarter of next year. But since gas exports generally involve conversion to LNG (pipelines can deliver gas to adjacent countries, but not to Europe or Asia), Washington's attitude toward LNG export agreements is essential to increased shipments to South America, Asia, Europe and — yes — the Middle East

Here's hoping a Trump administration will open the gates on the export of a clean, abundant fuel produced in America by Americans. It fits with the next president's vow to create jobs and prosperity in this country.

The era of being a net energy importer has been in decline for years because of the shale revolution. Now, that revolution can make its mark far from the gas deposits of Oklahoma and other gas-producing states.



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East Mooringsport customer: 'I don't trust this water'

Lex Talamo, alex.talamo@shreveporttimes.com 2:27 p.m. CST December 13, 2016



(Photo: Henrietta Wildsmith/The Times)

Customers of East Mooringsport water system are concerned with what's coming out of their taps.

Rachel Hudson, who has lived in the surrounding neighborhood since 1978, said the water quality in the area is so horrible she wouldn't even let her cats drink it.

"I won't drink tap water. I can see things floating around in it," Hudson said. "I have no sympathy for people who don't care about this water quality. I think the city wastes a lot of money that could be spent on more important things like this."

The water system has a long history of [drinking water violations](#)

(https://sdw.opd.dhh.la.gov/DWW/JSP/Violations.jsp?tinwsys_is_number=210&tinwsys_st_code=LA) — 18 group violations and 484 individual violations to date — ranging from failure to give mandated public notices of violations to major monitoring violations and failure to submit a monitoring plan, according to [Environmental Protection Agency \(https://echo.epa.gov/?redirect=echo\)](https://echo.epa.gov/?redirect=echo) data.

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In June, the state took it upon itself to test for lead in the homes of nine community members who volunteered. Two of the nine samples showed trace amounts of lead contamination— but not enough to exceed the EP A standard that would force the district to take action and warn customers.

Before this summer's testing, the [East Mooringsport Water System \(https://sdw.opd.dhh.la.gov/DWW/JSP/WaterSystemDetail.jsp?tinwsys_is_number=210&tinwsys_st_code=LA&wsnumber=LA1017010\)](https://sdw.opd.dhh.la.gov/DWW/JSP/WaterSystemDetail.jsp?tinwsys_is_number=210&tinwsys_st_code=LA&wsnumber=LA1017010) hadn't been tested for over five years— despite a 2013 administrative order to monitor, collect samples and report contamination levels for lead and other toxins and chemicals.

Since 2013, the state has fined the community more than \$43,500 for violating that order .

The water system's officials could not be reached for comment. But David Yeates— former manager of the Blanchard Water System, which is in the process of acquiring the East Mooringsport system— said small water systems like the East Mooringsport system might not have the resources to do the testing.

"They just don't have the personnel to do that," Yeates said. "Being in compliance is a difficulty for them. I don't think they've had more than one person to operate that system in a long time."

Edward Turnley, who distributes monthly water bills to 90 East Mooringsport customers, said cost also figures into the equation.

"Honestly, we just don't have the money to do (the testing)," Turnley said. "We're barely hanging on here."

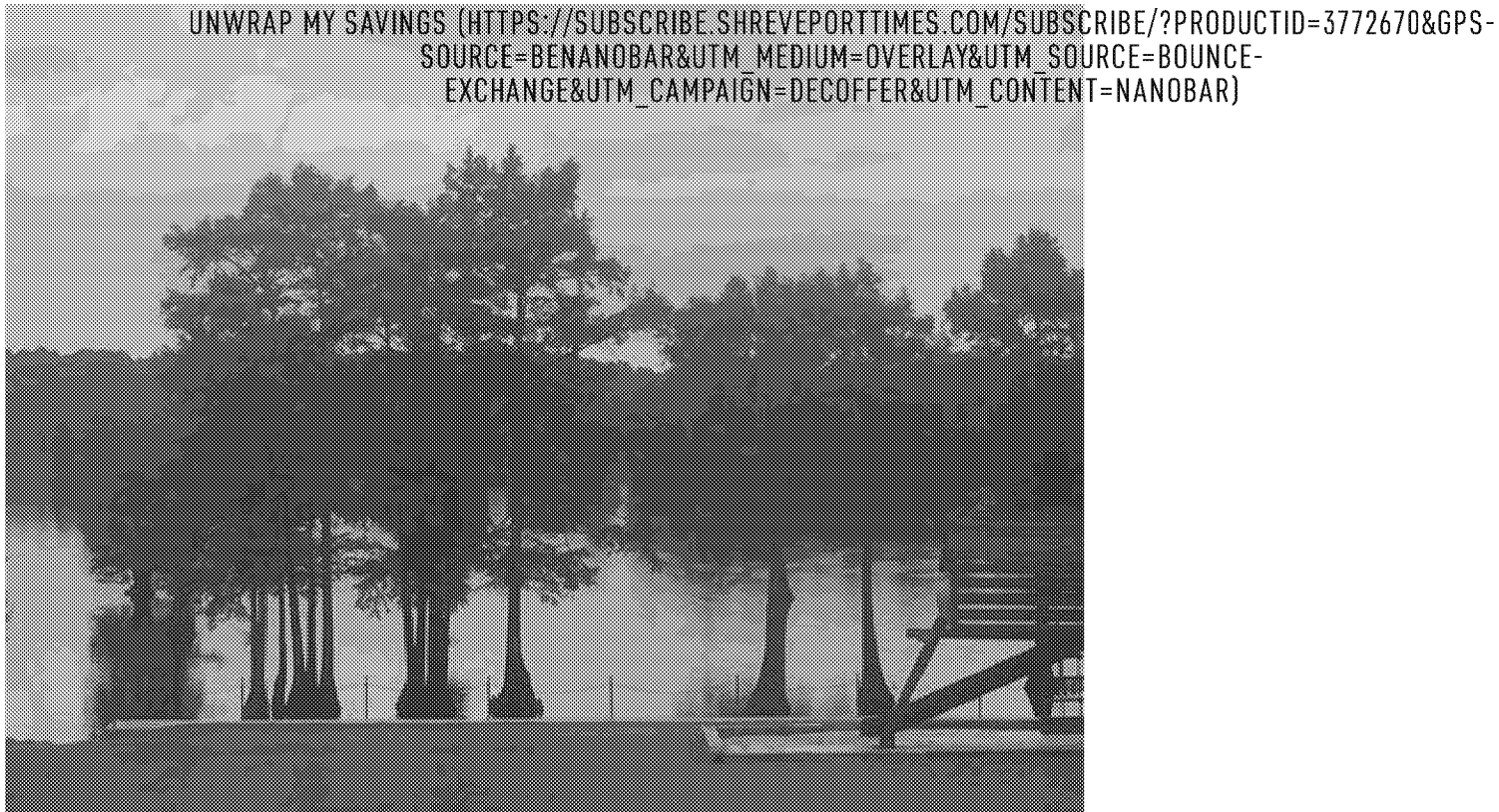
RELATED: [Lead levels are up, according to a USA Today report \(/story/news/2016/03/23/lead-levels-up-usa-today-reports-state-louisiana-drinking-water/81497326/\)](#)

A history of violations and lack of lead testing

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports exposure to lead at any level is unsafe, especially for children. Elevated levels of lead in the blood can cause irreversible health problems, such as permanent learning disabilities, lowered IQs and difficulty concentrating, according to a Vox digital media company report.

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(Photo: Lex Talamo)

The water system's violations stretch all the way back to 2005, when the system failed to meet standards for lead and copper testing required by the state's Safe Drinking Water (<http://dhh.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/page/963>) Program. Thirty-eight children tested positive for elevated blood lead levels in 2014, according to Center for Disease Control and Prevention data (<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/data/state/ladata.htm>).

"The next step they are going to face is penalties," said Louisiana Department of Health' (http://dhh.louisiana.gov/assets/oph/Center-EH/engineering/SDWP/ACR2013_Report.pdf)s spokeswoman Samantha Faulkner.

Faulkner said the water system had amassed fines for 1,025 days of noncompliance, as of June— for a fee of \$43,562.51, with penalties continuing to accrue daily. LDH has completed several preliminary investigations to verify the system's noncompliance and also attended a community meeting in August of 2014 to discuss the existing violations— but the department has not imposed penalties on East Mooringsport water system due to the proposed acquisition by Blanchard, Faulkner said.

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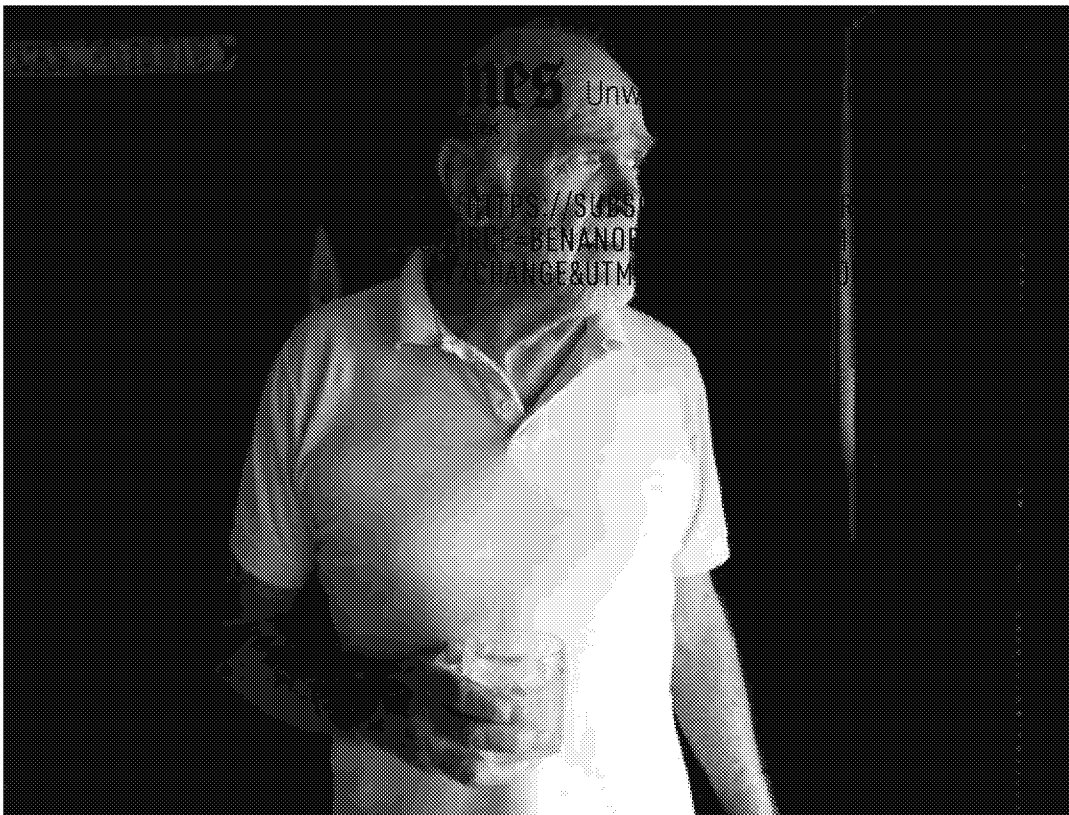
"Most complaints were administrative in nature and not concerning water quality ," Faulkner wrote in an email.

But Faulkner added LDH supports Blanchard's re-possession of the water system as a solution to its noncompliance issues. Blanchard will not be responsible for the outstanding fine but will take over monitoring, operation and maintenance our of the East Mooringsport area, Faulkner said.

The water system's recent consumer confidence reports (<http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov/assets/oph/Center-EH/engineering/CCR/2014/Caddo/index.htm>) — an annual report that lets residents know about the quality of their drinking water and any potential issues— made no mention of elevated levels of lead in the water supply.

RELATED: Caddo parish has high lead levels (</story/news/2016/01/25/report-high-levels-lead-poisoning-reported-caddo-parish/79298396/>)

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(Photo: Henrietta Wildsmith/The Times)

Residents along Sundown Drive in Mooringsport said they learned about the unsafe quality of water mainly through word of mouth by their neighbors or saw warnings to "boil water" on their water bills.

Larry Free, who has lived in his home on Sundown Drive for more than 25 years, also said he won't drink his tap water . He also boils water before he cooks with it.

"I don't trust this water. I thought they were taking care of it. They haven't," Free said. "I'm concerned. It makes me angry , but there's nothing I can do about it."

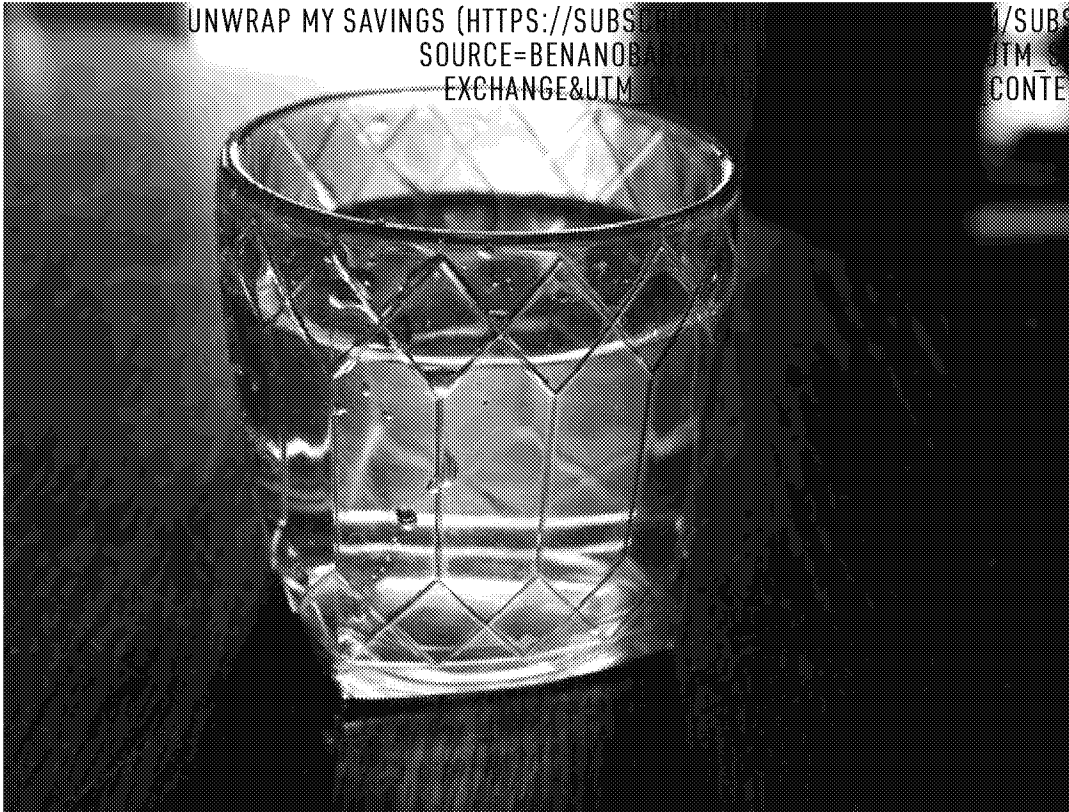
Blanchard officials have been trying to purchase the East Mooringsport system since 2014 but ran into complications with a USDA loan that East Mooringsport obtained in the early 1990s and never repaid.

It's not unheard of for a water system with frequent violations to turn around. Blanchard Utilities did just that in 2014 when they took over East Cove water system — a second system that serves about 600 Mooringsport residents and covers about 200 meters of Crouch Dam Road. Prior to Blanchard's take over, East Cove had its own history of monitoring violations — at least five, according to LDH data.

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(Photo: Henrietta Wildsmith/The Times)

Kim and Terry Matthews, who have lived along Lake End Road in Mooringsport for 30 years, went on record last year (<http://www.ktbs.com/story/22334141/sometimes-you-have-water-sometimes-you-dont>) about problems they experienced with East Cove water system. Since Blanchard has taken over, however, the couple said they have had no problems.

"We never drank it before. It would come out brown," said Kim Matthews. "It's been a dramatic change."



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(Photo: Lex Talamo)

Terry Matthews added, "Now we drink it straight out of the faucet. We've got good water now."

Elaine Emmons said she and her husband Donald were among the first to build a home in the 35-year-old subdivision along Sundown Drive in which they live— in the former troubled East Cove water district. Emmons said she had to replace several aging appliances over the years— a hot water heater, dishwasher and refrigerator ice maker— because piping had begun to corrode.

"The water had just eaten up the pipes," she said.

But the water quality in her home has improved since Blanchard took over , Emmons said.

"They have corrected a lot of problems," she said.

Other residents have taken additional steps to protect themselves and their families. Brian Hudson said his family heard about unsafe drinking water quality when they moved into the neighborhood of Pleasant Circle. Hudson installed a water filtration system as a precaution.

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"We never drank it. We put our own filter system in," Hudson said. "We still use it."

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Louisiana may use private money to fix wetlands, coast under new federal law



A new federal water infrastructure bill will allow Louisiana to experiment with "environmental impact banks" to raise money to restore the coast and wetlands. (NOLA.com | *The Times-Picayune* file photo)



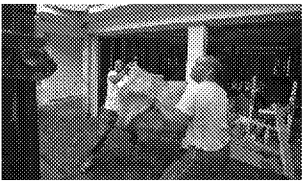
By **Richard Rainey, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune**

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on December 13, 2016 at 9:36 AM, updated December 13, 2016 at 9:37 AM

While much of the to-do about the latest major water bill to pass Congress focused on lead-tainted drinking water in **Flint, Michigan**, and the **drought in California**, tucked among its provisions are details that could signal a major shift in how environmental restoration projects are financed in Louisiana.

The proposed law, which heads to the president's desk after passing the Senate on a 78-21 vote Saturday (Dec. 11), lays the groundwork for so-called "environmental impact banks," financial institutions to attract private money to pay for a sweeping range of projects, from wetlands mitigation to coastal restoration to habitat renewal for endangered species and beyond.



Bill provides hurricane protection for River Parishes

While similar wetland mitigation banks have been operating in Louisiana for a while, this new concept seems to be on a grander scale that ventures into some uncharted policy territory, explained Rep. **Garret Graves**, R-Baton Rouge, who steered the new provisions into the bill's final version.

The impact banks could run on a somewhat similar principle to the mitigation banks: companies wishing to destroy wetlands for a construction project can pay into the banks to offset the damage. The bank can then collect enough resources over time to finance large-scale projects that better reflect Louisiana's master wetlands restoration plan.

"You can be more strategic about it by incentivizing or dictating where the restoration would occur," Graves said.

The impact banks have a few new wrinkles, too. Under the pending law, companies could pay into the banks ahead of time, knowing that they may need to offset upcoming damage they'll wreak on the environment, or to prepare for any possible catastrophes, such as oil spills. It's a two-pronged solution that gives companies some insurance against future disasters while providing underfunded coastal restoration projects with much-needed funds well ahead of schedule.

Essentially, it allows resources that would have funded piecemeal mitigation projects to be combined to address more sweeping problems.

But there is uncertainty on what the final regulations governing the banks will look like. The bill directs a federal task force created under the Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act to draw up the new regulations. That group includes members of several federal environmental agencies, the Army Corps of Engineers and officials within Louisiana's government.

Graves said the possibilities are wide open at this point. Private companies, nonprofits, even state government may be eligible to set up impact banks. Attracting investments ahead of time may speed up completion of vital restoration projects. The task force has been asked to prioritize projects to best address the loss of Louisiana's coast and wetlands, too, he said.

"Let's use that science to make sure we're doing it in the right places," Graves said.

But with a blank slate, Graves acknowledged the task force would have to be diligent. Not only would it have to establish acceptable environmental standards and monitoring processes for privately-financed mitigation projects, but also be aware of what legal hurdles, such as environmental lawsuits, these banks may face.

The water bill, in which the previous Water Resources Development Act was rolled into the Water Infrastructure Improvements Act for the Nation, or WIIN Act, had a number of other Louisiana-centric provisions to address its relatively unique environmental problems.

Chief among them is clearing the way for \$150 million of work in the flood-ravaged parishes, including Livingston, East Baton Rouge and Ascension. It also commands the Army Corps of Engineers to speed up long-stalled flood and hurricane protection projects, such as the \$744 million levee system along the southwestern shore of Lake Pontchartrain and a diversion project to ease flooding on the Comite River.

West Shore Lake Pontchartrain Risk Reduction project would center on a system of earthen levees and floodwalls around Montz, LaPlace, Reserve and Garyville to lower the risk of flooding associated with storm surge from a hurricane strong enough to have a 1 percent chance of striking in any given year. That area was the epicenter of flooding from Hurricane Isaac in 2012. It has been stalled for nearly 40 years.

The bill also lowers the cost of dredging for the state to 25 percent of a project. Previously, Louisiana had to pay half while the federal government covered the rest.

Graves said the bill also included language to allow local companies, ports or governments to dredge and then apply for cost reimbursement from the corps -- a policy that could speed up the work.

Graves called the legislation a step in the right direction. It also marked the first time in years that the waterways law was updated on its regular two-year schedule. The law was last updated in 2014. Before that, 2007.

"Just to be clear, this does not address every problem," Graves said. "We have a lot of work to do."

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St. Tammany gets \$3.7 million from FEMA for disaster protection



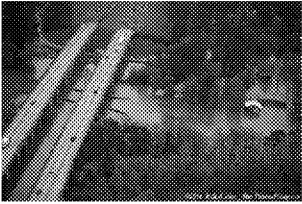
By **Robert Rhoden**, [NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune](#)

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on December 13, 2016 at 1:25 PM, updated December 13, 2016 at 2:48 PM

FEMA has awarded **St. Tammany Parish** government \$3.7 million to protect people and property from natural disasters. The funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's hazard mitigation grant program comes as result of the **spring 2016 flooding**.

Parish officials said they will evaluate existing risks and vulnerabilities and use St. Tammany's mitigation plan to determine the best use of the money. "The project, or projects, that will be funded through this dedicated grant will join a long list of hazard mitigation work we have completed or that is already underway," Parish President Pat Brister said. "Whether its marsh restoration, drainage improvements or any number of large infrastructure projects that can help protect our citizens, we remain committed to the prevention of loss of life or property at the hands of a disaster."



Flooding damages 718 structures in St. Tammany Parish

The March flooding damaged at least 718 structures in St. Tammany. Most of the damage was found on the west side of the parish where the Bogue Falaya River exceeded record levels in the **Covington** area, the parish government has said.

Gov. **John Bel Edwards** said the state will receive about \$26 million from FEMA's hazard mitigation grant program. "Over the last year, 56 of Louisiana's 64 parishes have received disaster declarations due to flooding," Edwards said. "The March floods stretched from north to south Louisiana and caused massive destruction to homes and businesses.

"After recovery, preventing future floods should be our top priority. These resources will help our communities continue to rebuild stronger than ever, and I will continue to work with our congressional delegation to secure additional funding that we can use to prevent future disasters."

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